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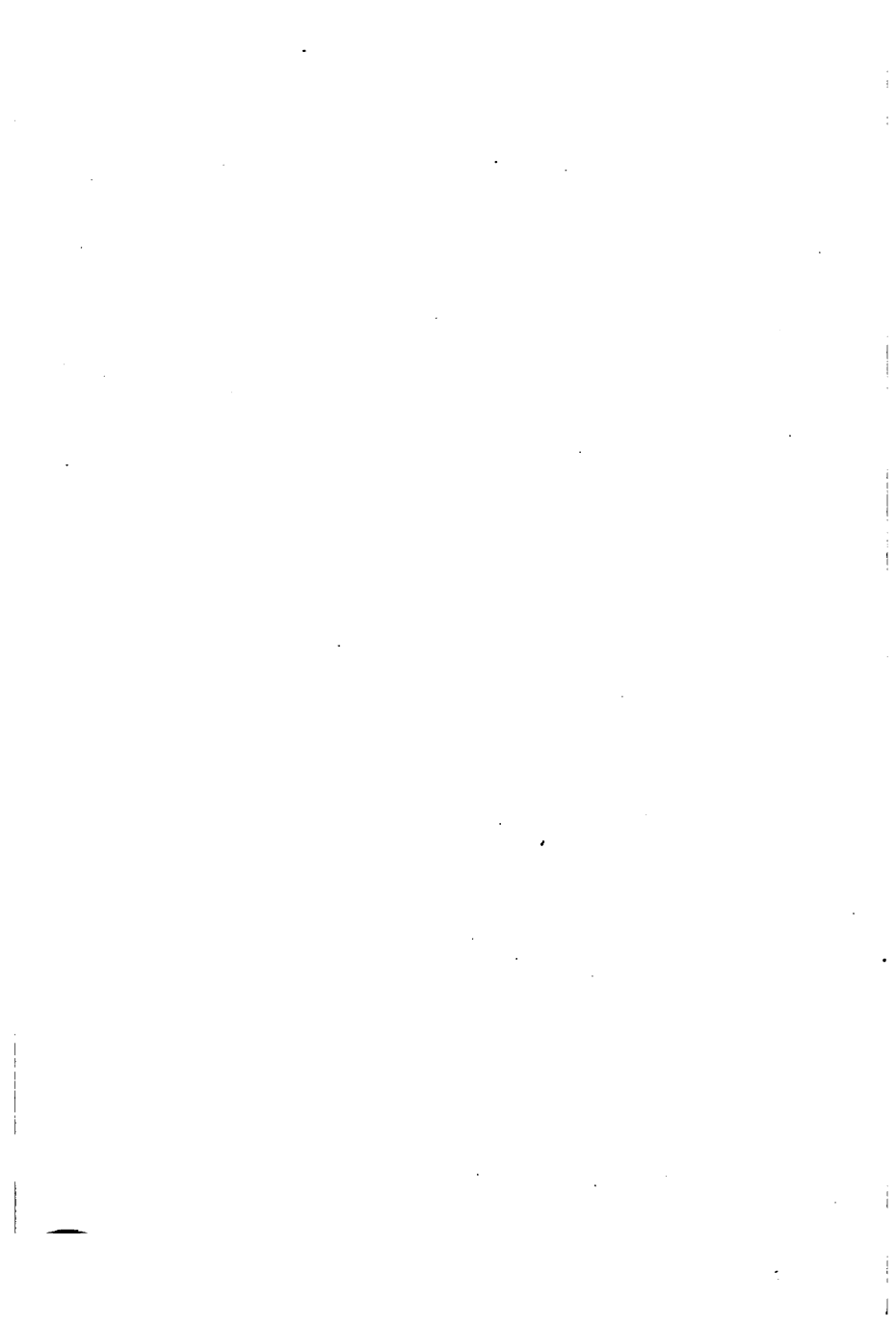
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GREEN PASTURES AND PICCADILLY.



GREEN PASTURES

AND

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PICCADILLY.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON,"
"A PRINCESS OF THULE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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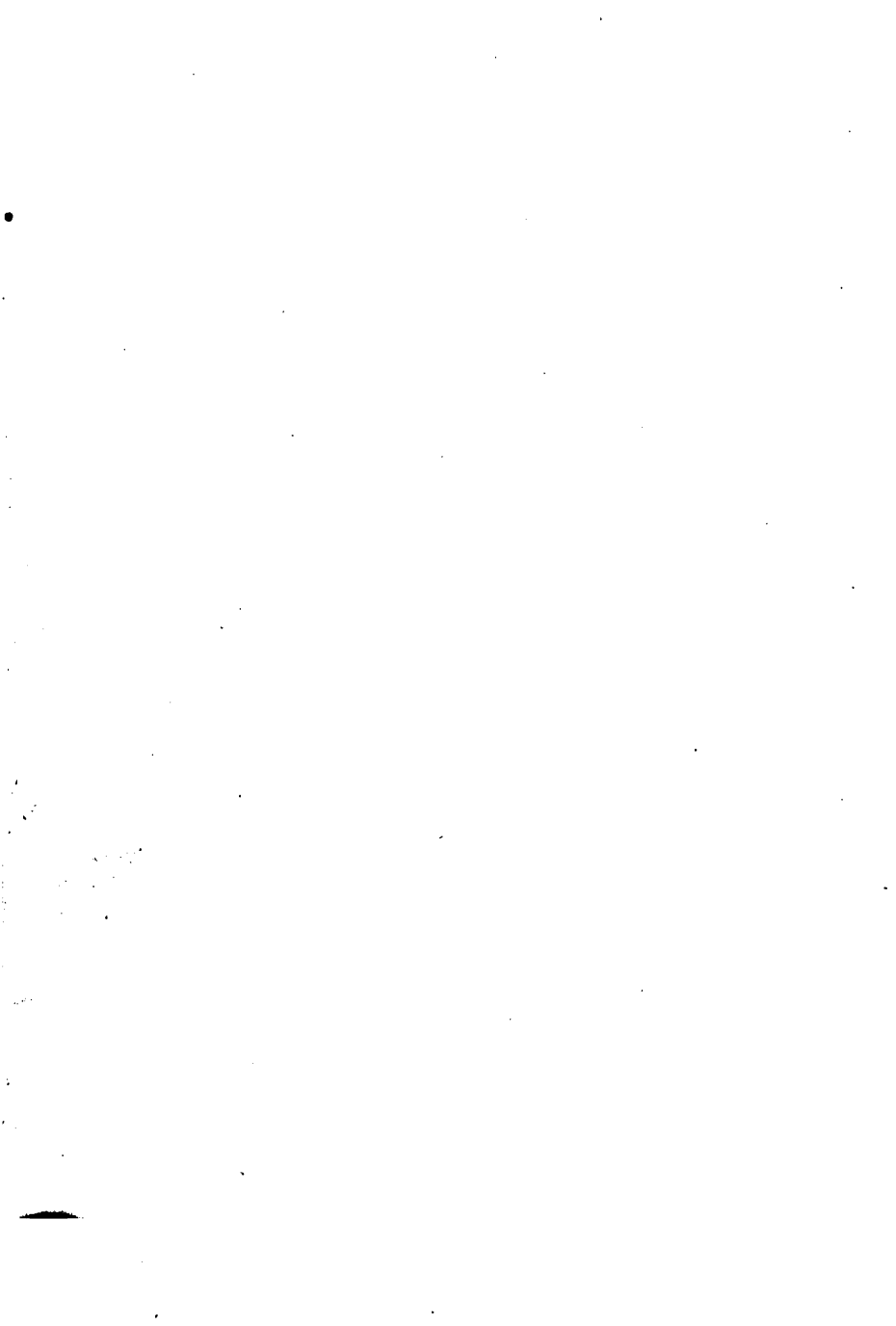
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GREEN PASTURES AND PICCADILLY.

CHAPTER I.

A GLANCE BACK.

MEANWHILE, what of the widower whom we had left behind in England? It was fairly to be expected that Balfour, once he had seen his wife handed over to that wise and tender counsellor who was to cure her of all her sentimental sufferings, would go straightway back to England and rejoice in the new freedom that allowed him to give up the whole of his time and attention to public affairs. At all events that was what Lady Sylvia expected. Now he would have no domestic cares to trouble him. As far as his exertions were necessary to the safety of the State, England was secure. For Lady Sylvia

always spoke of her husband as having far more serious duties to perform than any Home Secretary or Lord Chancellor of them all.

Balfour, having taken a last look—from the deck of his friend's yacht—at the great dark ship going out into the western horizon—got back to Queenstown again, and to London. No doubt he was free enough; and there was plenty at this time to engage the attention of Members of Parliament. But he did not at all seem to rejoice in his freedom; and Englebury had about as little reason as Ballinascroon to applaud the zeal of its representative. He went down to the House, it is true; and he generally dined there; but his chief cronies discovered in him an absolute listlessness, whenever, in the intervals between their small jokes, they mentioned some Bill or other; while, on the other hand, he was greatly interested in finding out which of these gentlemen had made long sea-voyages, and was as anxious to get information about steamers, storms, fogs, and the American climate as if he were about to arrange for the transference of the whole population of England to

the plains of Colorado. The topics of the hour seemed to have no concern whatever for this silent and rather melancholy man, who refused all invitations, and dined either at the House or by himself at a small table at the Reform. The Public Worship Regulation Bill awoke in him neither enthusiasm nor aversion. The Duty on Third-Class Passengers?—they might have made it a guinea a head if they liked. In other days he had been an eager demonstrator of the necessity of our having a Public Prosecutor; now he had scarcely a word to say. There were only two subjects in which at this moment he seemed keenly interested; the one was the Report which Mr. Plimsoll's Commission had just published, and the other was, singularly enough, the Act just passed in America about the paper currency. What earthly reason could he have for bothering about the financial arrangements of America? He did not own a red cent of the American Debt.

One forenoon he was walking through St. James's Park when he was overtaken by a cer-

tain noble lord—an ingenuous youth whom he had known at Oxford.

“Balfour,” said this young man, walking on with him, “you are a Scotchman—you can tell me what I have to expect. Fact is, I have done rather a bold thing—I have taken a shooting of 13,000 acres, for this autumn only, in the island of Mull; and I have never been there. But I sent my own man up; and he believes the reports they gave were all right.”

“What you are to expect?” said Balfour, good-humouredly. “Plenty of shooting probably; and plenty of rain, certainly.”

“So they say,” continued the young man. “And my *avant-courier* says there may be some difficulty about provisions—he hints something about hiring a small steam-yacht that we might send across to Oban at a pinch——”

“Yes, that would be advisable, if you are not near Tobermory.”

“Eighteen miles off.”

Then the young man was fired with a sudden generosity.

"Your wife has gone to America, hasn't she?"

"Yes," was the simple answer.

"Are you booked for the 12th?"

"No."

"Come down with me. I shan't leave till the 10th, if that will suit you. The House is sure to be up—in fact, you fellows have nothing to do—you are only gammoning your constituencies."

"It's lucky for some people that they can sit in Parliament without having any constituency to gammon," said Balfour.

"You mean we mightn't find it quite so easy to get in," said the young man, with a modest laugh; for indeed his service in Parliament was of the slightest sort—was limited, in fact, to procuring admission for one or two lady-friends on the night of a great debate. "But what do you say to Mull? If we don't get much of a dinner, we are to have a piper to play to us while we eat. And of course there will be good whisky. What do you say?"

"I say that it is very good of you; and I

should like it extremely; but I think I shall stay in town this autumn."

"In town!"

"Yes."

"All the autumn?" exclaimed the young man with an air as though he half expected this maniac to turn and bite him on the arm.

"Yes," said Balfour; and then he stammered a sort of apology. "The fact is that a married man feels himself taken at an unfair advantage if he goes anywhere without his wife. I hate nothing so much as dining as a single man with a lot of married people. They pity you and patronize you——"

"But, my dear fellow, there won't be any married people up at this place—I can't pronounce the name. There will be only two men besides ourselves—a regular bachelor party. You surely can't mean to stop in town the whole of the autumn—and be chased about your club by the cleaning people. You will cut your throat before the end of August."

"And what then? The newspapers are hard pushed at that time. If I committed suicide in

the hall of the Reform Club, I should deserve the gratitude of the whole country. But seriously I am sorry I can't go down with you to Scotland—much obliged all the same."

"When does Lady Sylvia return?" asked his companion, carelessly.

"About the end of October, I should think," Balfour said; and then he added, "Very likely we shall go to Italy for the winter."

He spoke quite calmly. He seemed to take it as a mere matter of ordinary arrangement that Lady Sylvia and himself should decide where they should spend the winter. For of course this ingenuous youth walking with him was not to know that Lady Sylvia had separated herself from her husband of her own free will and choice.

"Good-bye, Balfour," said the young Lord L——, as he turned off and went down towards Queen Anne's Gate. "I would have sent you some game if Lady Sylvia had been at home: it would be no use to a club man."

Balfour walked on, and in a second or two found himself before the Clock Tower of the

Houses of Parliament, rising in all its gilded pride into the blue summer sky. Once upon a time—and that not so long ago—all the interests of his life were centred in the great building beneath that tower; when he first entered it—even in the humble capacity of member for Balinascreen—a new world of activity and ambition seemed opening up before him. But at this very moment, strangely enough, the mere sight of the Houses of Parliament appeared to awaken in him a curious sort of aversion. He had been going down to a morning sitting, rather because he had nothing else to do than that he was interested in the business going forward. But this first glimpse of the Parliament buildings caused him suddenly to change his mind; he turned off into Parliament Street, and called in at the offices of Mr. Billy Bolitho.

Mr. Bolitho was as cheerful and bland as usual. Moreover, he regarded this young man with sympathy, for he noticed his reserved and almost troubled air, and he at once divined the cause. Did not everybody know that some of these large firms were being hardly hit just then?

The fine old trade in Manchester goods had broken down before markets glutted with grey shirtings and jeans. The homeward consignments of teas and silks were no longer eagerly competed for by the brokers. The speculations in cotton to which some of the larger houses had resorted were wilder than the wildest gambling on the Stock Exchange. It was a great thing, Mr. Bolitho knew, to have belonged to such a firm as Balfour, Skinner, Green, and Co., in the palmy days of commerce, but these fine times could not last for ever.

"Come, Balfour," said Mr. Bolitho, brightly, "have a glass of sherry and a cigar. You don't look quite up to the mark this morning."

"Thank you, I will. I believe idleness is ruining my health and spirits—there is nothing doing at the House."

"Why don't you start a coach, and spend your forenoons that way?" said Bolitho gaily.

"I'll tell you what I will do with you, if you like," said Balfour, "I will drive you down to The Lilacs. Come. It is a fine day, and they will give you some sort of dinner in the even-

ing. You can be here by ten to-morrow morning."

Mr. Bolitho was seated on a table, his legs dangling in the air, and he was carefully cutting the end off a cigar.

"Done with you," said he, getting on his feet again, "if you first lunch with me at the Devonshire."

This, too, was agreed upon, and Balfour, as the two walked up to St. James's Street, did his very best to entertain this kind friend who had taken compassion on his loneliness. And as they set out in the shining afternoon, to drive away down into the quiet of Surrey, Balfour strove to let his companion know that he was greatly obliged to him, and talked far more than was his wont, although his talk was mostly about such roads as Lady Sylvia knew, and about such houses as Lady Sylvia had admired.

"Have you heard the last about Englebury?" he asked.

"No."

"Old Chorley has been struck with remorse of conscience, and has handed over that piece of

filched common to the town, to make a public green."

"That public green was nearly keeping you out of this Parliament," observed Mr. Bolitho, with a demure smile.

"And there is to be a public gymnasium put up on the ground ; and I have promised to go down and throw the thing open. What do you say, Bolitho ; will you take a run down there, and drink a glass of wine with old Chorley, and show the boys how to twist round a trapèze ?"

"I am very glad you have made friends with Chorley," said Mr. Bolitho. "He might have done you a deal of mischief. But I do think you are becoming a little more prudent ; no doubt you have found that all constituencies are not Ballinascroons."

"I may have become more prudent," said Balfour, with the indifference of a man who is mentally sick and out of sorts, "but it is not from any desire to remain in Parliament. I am tired of it—I am disgusted with it—I should like to quit it altogether."

Bolitho was not surprised. He had known a

good many of these spoilt children of fortune. And he knew that, when by chance they were robbed of some of their golden toys—say, that an income of £30,000 a-year was suddenly cut down to £5,000—they became impatient and vexed, and spoke as if life were no longer worth having.

“Try being out of Parliament for a year or two, and see if you don’t change your mind,” said Mr. Bolitho shrewdly. “There is something in the old proverb that says you never know the value of anything until you have lost it.”

“That is true enough,” said Balfour, with decision; but he was not thinking of Ballinascroon, nor yet of Englebury, nor of any seat in any Parliament.

It was the cool of the evening when they got down to The Lilacs, and very quiet, and still, and beautiful looked the cottage amidst its rose-bushes and honeysuckle. No doubt there was a deserted air about the rooms; the furniture was covered with chintz; everything that could be locked and shut up was locked and shut up. But all the same Mr. Bolitho was glad to be

taken round the place, and to be told how Lady Sylvia had done this and had done that, and how that the whole designing and decoration of the place was her own. Mr. Bolitho did not quite enter into this worship at the shrine of a departed saint, because he knew very well that if Lady Sylvia had been at The Lilacs that evening, he would not have been there; but of course he professed a profound admiration for the manner in which the limited space had been made the most of, and declared that, for his part, he never went into the country and saw the delights of a country house without wishing that Providence had seen fit to make him a farmer or squire.

And Mr. Bolitho got a fairly good dinner, too, considering that there were in the place only the housekeeper and a single servant, besides the gardener. They would not remain indoors after dinner on such a beautiful evening. They went out to smoke a cigar in the garden, and the skies were clear over them, and the cool winds of the night were sweetened with the scent of flowers.

"They have no such refreshing coolness as this after the hot days in America," said Balfour, "at least so they tell me. It must be a dreadful business, after the glare of the day, to find no relief—to find the night as hot as the day. But I suppose they have got over the hottest of the weather there."

"Where is Lady Sylvia now?" asked Mr. Bolitho, seeing that the thoughts of the young man—troubled as they must be by these commercial cares—were nevertheless often turned to the distant lands in which his wife was wandering.

"Up towards Canada, I should think," he said. "Soon she will be out in the West—and there it is cool even in the heat of summer."

"I don't wonder you remained in England," said Mr. Bolitho, frankly.

"Why?" said Balfour, who could not understand Mr. Bolitho's having an opinion about the matter in any direction.

"Things have not been going well in the City," said Mr. Bolitho, cautiously.

"I suppose not," said Balfour carelessly. "But that does not concern me much. I never interfere in the business arrangements of our firm; the men whom my father trusted I can afford to trust. But I suppose you are right. There has been over-speculation. Fortunately, my partners are sufficiently cautious men; they have already made money; they don't need to gamble."

Bolitho was troubled in his mind. Was the young man acting a part; or was he really ignorant of the rumour that his partners, finding the profits on their business gradually diminishing, and having sustained severe losses in one or two directions, had put a considerable portion of their capital into one or two investments which were at that very time being proved to be gigantic frauds? After all, Bolitho was a generously-disposed man.

"Balfour," said he, "you won't mind my speaking frankly to you?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I don't know how far you examine into the details of the business transactions of

your firm ; but, you know, commercial things have been in a bad way of late ; and you ought—I mean any man situated as you are—ought to be a little particular.”

“ Oh, I am quite satisfied,” Balfour said. “ I don’t know much about business ; but I can understand the Profit and Loss and Capital Accounts in the ledger ; and these I periodically examine. Why the firm gave £1000 to the last Mansion House Fund ! ”

Bolitho had heard before of firms hopelessly bankrupt making such dramatic displays of wealth, in order to stave off the evil day ; but of course he did not mention such a thing in connection with such a house as Balfour, Skinner, Green, & Co. He only said that he was glad to find that Balfour did examine the books.

CHAPTER II.

FURTHER LOOKINGS BACK.

WHAT was it, then, this feeling of inexplicable unrest and anxiety that possessed us as we drew near Niagara? Was it the fear of being disappointed? Was it the fear of being overawed? Or was it that mysterious vague nerve catching something of the vibration that the vast cataracts sent shuddering through the land?

It was a blazing hot day; and the two scraggy horses were painfully hauling the rumbling old omnibus up a steep and dusty hill to the Clifton House hotel. Through the small window we could look down into the deep gorge; and there were no foaming rapids, but a deep, narrow, apparently motionless river of a singular rich green colour. It was an opaque, solid green—not unlike sealing wax—and the smooth shining surface had here and there a bold swirl of white. Then the sides of the gorge showed masses of

ruddy rocks and green trees ; and there was the brilliant blue overhead : altogether—a German lithograph.

But why this curious unrest, while as yet the Falls were far away and out of sight? Well, there were two of us in that little omnibus who once upon a time saw a strange thing, never to be forgotten. We had climbed up from Chamounix to the small hostelry of Montanvert. We were going along the rugged little mountain-path to cross the Mer de Glace. But where the great glacier lay in the high valley, and all over that, and all beyond that, nothing was visible but a vague grey mist that seemed to be enclasping the world. We stumbled on through the cold, damp atmosphere, until we found before us the great masses of ice in their spectral greens and whites. I think it was just about this time, when we had reached the edge of the glacier, that we were suddenly arrested by a wonderful sight. Right overhead, as it were, and far above the floating seas of mist, gleamed a wild break of dazzling blue ; and far into this—so far away that the very distance seemed awful

—rose a series of majestic peaks, their riven sides sparkling with sunlit snows. It was a terrible thing to see. All around us the solemn world of ice and shadows: above us the other, and silent, and bewildering world of light, with those glittering peaks cleaving the blue as if they would pierce to the very throne of Heaven. The phantasmal fog-clouds went this way and that, taking strange shapes as they floated over the glacier and showed us visionary glimpses of the lower mountains; but there was neither cloud, nor fog, nor mist in that distant dome, and the giant peaks stood unapproachable there in their lonely and awful splendour. To have seen this sight once is a thing to be remembered during a man's lifetime; it is an experience that perhaps few of us would care to repeat. Was this strange unrest, then, a sensation of fear? Did we shrink from the first shock of a sight that might be too terrible in its majesty?

If that were so, we were speedily reassured. Through this port-hole of a window we caught a glimpse of something white and grey; and, as we recognized from many pictures the

American Falls, it was with a certain sense of comfort that we knew this thing to be graspable. And as we got further along, the beautiful, fair, calm picture came better into view; and it seemed to be fitting that over this silent sheet of white water, and over the mass of dark rocks and trees beyond, there should be a placid pale blue summer sky. Further on we go, and now we come in sight of something vaster—but still placid, and beautiful, and silent. We know from the deep indentation and the projection in the middle that these are the Horse-Shoe Falls; and they seem to be a stupendous semi-circular wall, of solid and motionless stalactites, with a touch of green at the summit of the mighty pillars of snow. We see no motion, we hear no sound; they are as frozen falls, with the sunlight touching them here and there, and leaving their shadows a pale grey. But we knew that this vast white thing was not motionless; for in the centre of that semicircle rose a great white column of vapour, softly spreading itself abroad as it ascended into the pale blue sky, and shutting out altogether the

dark table-land beyond the high line of the Falls. And as we got out of the vehicle, and walked down towards the edge of the precipice, the air around us was filled with a low and murmuring sound, soft, continuous, muffled, and remote; and now we could catch the downward motion of these falling volumes of water, the friction of the air fraying the surface of the heavy masses into a soft and feathery white. There was nothing here that was awful and bewildering; but a beautiful, graceful spectacle—the white surface of the descending water looking almost lace-like in its texture—that accorded well with the still pale blue of the sky overhead. It was something to gaze on with a placid and sensuous satisfaction; perhaps because the continuous, monotonous murmur of sound was soothing, slumberous, dreamlike.

But Bell's quick eye was not directed solely to this calm and beautiful picture. She saw that Lady Sylvia was disturbed and anxious.

"Had we not better go into the hotel at once?" said she. "There is no use trying to see Niagara in a minute. It has to be done

systematically. And besides there may be letters waiting for us."

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Lady Sylvia; and then she added seriously—as if her whole thoughts had been centred on the Falls—"It is a very hopeful thing that we have not been disappointed at the first sight. They say nearly every one is. I dare say it will be some days before we get to understand the grandeur of Niagara."

"My dear Lady Sylvia," said one of us, as we were all walking up to the hotel, "you might spend thirty years here in such weather as this without knowing anything of the grandeur of Niagara. There is no mysticism possible with a pale blue sky. I will endeavour to expound this matter to you after luncheon——"

"Gott bewahre!" exclaims the German, flippantly.

"—— and I will show you that the size of any natural object has nothing to do with the effect it produces on the mind. I will show you how, with a proper atmospheric effect, an artist could make a more impressive picture of an in-

significant island off the Argyllshire coast than he could if he painted Mont Blanc, under blue skies, on a canvas fifty feet square. The poetry of nature is all a question of atmosphere; failing that you may as well fall back on a drawing-master's notion of the picturesque—a broken mill-wheel and a withered tree. My dear friends——”

“Perhaps you will explain to us, then,” said Bell, not caring how she interrupted this valuable lecture, “how, if we can put grandeur into anything by waiting till a little mist and gloom get round it—if there is nothing in size at all—how we were so foolish as to come to Niagara at all? What did we come for?”

“I really don't know.”

“He is only talking nonsense, Bell!” says a sharper voice; and we reach the hotel.

But there are no letters.

“I thought not,” says Queen T., cheerfully; as if news from England was a matter of profound indifference to every one of us. “But there is no hurry. There is no chance of our missing them, as we shall be here some days.”

"I suppose they will have some English newspapers here?" suggests Lady Sylvia, just as if she had been in Brussels or Cologne.

"I should think not. If there are any, they will be old enough. What do you want with English newspapers, Lady Sylvia?"

"I want to see what has been going on in Parliament," she answers, without the least flinching.

"What a desperate patriot you are, Lady Sylvia," says Bell, laughing, as we go up the stairs to our rooms. "I don't think I ever read a debate in my life—except about Mr. Plimsoll."

"But your husband is not in Parliament," returns Lady Sylvia, with blushing courage.

"And where your treasure is there will your heart be," says Queen T. in a gay and careless fashion; but she has a gentle hand within her friend's arm; and then she takes the key to open the door of her room for her, treating her altogether like a spoilt child.

The after-luncheon lecture on the sublime in nature never came off; for these careless gad-

abouts, heedless of instruction and the proper tuition of the mind, must needs hire a carriage to drive forthwith to the Rapids above the Falls. And Queen T. had begged Lady Sylvia to take her waterproof with her; and the Lieutenant, perched up beside the driver, was furnished with a couple of umbrellas. So we set out.

And very soon we began to see something of the mighty volume of water falling over the Horse-Shoe Fall; for right away in there at the middle of the bend there was no white foam at all, but a projecting, unceasing bound of clear crystal of a curiously brilliant green, into which the sun struck deep. And what about the want of vapour and atmospheric effect? Presently we found ourselves in a sort of water-witch's paradise. Far below us boiled that hell-cauldron of white smoke—roaring and thundering so that the ground around us trembled—and then this mighty pillar, rising and spreading over the landscape, enveloped us in clouds of shifting shapes and colours through which the gleaming green islands by the side of the road appeared to be mere phantasies of the eye. The earth

and the sky seemed to be inextricably mixed up in this confusion of water and sunlight. We were in a bewilderment of rainbows—the pale colours coming right up to the wheels of the carriage, and shining between us and the flowing streams and water-weeds a few yards off. And then again we drove on and right through this Undine world; and behold! we were in hot sunshine again, and rolling along a road that sent volumes of dust over us. It was only a trick of the great mother Nature. She had been treating her poor children to a bath; and now took this effectual method of drying them. And the dust about Niagara is the most dry and choking dust in the world.

We drove away around so as to get beyond the Falls, and then descended to the side of the noble river. Here we found the inevitable museum of photographs and pebbles; and a still stranger exhibition. We were professed sight-seers; and we agreed to see the burning spring of the Indians, no matter what the wild excitement might cost. So we were conducted into a little dark room, in the floor of which was a

hole, covered over. The performer—who was not attired in the garb of the wild man of the woods, as he ought to have been—removed the lid, and began to play a great many pranks with the gas which rose from the well. It was really wonderful. Some of us were carried away in imagination to the beautiful days in which a penny paid on entrance to a canvas tent unlocked more marvels than were known to all the wise men in the East. But this performance was monotonous. In vain we waited for our friend to open another door and show us the Fat Woman of Scandinavia. It was merely trifling with our feelings to offer each of us a glass of the fire-water to drink. We resented this insult; and sought the outer air again, having paid—what was it?—for that revelation of the wonders of Nature.

There was a grander sight outside—the great rapids whirling by at our very feet towards the sudden and sheer descent. The wild plain of waters seemed broader than any river; the horizon line was as the horizon of the sea, but it was a line broken by the wild tossing of the

waves as they came hurrying on to their doom. High over the green masses of the water the white crests were flung this way and that—in the maddening race and whirl these wild up-rearings resembled—who made this suggestion? —the eager outstretched hands of the dense crowd of worshippers who strive for the holy fire passing over their heads. And here, too, the noise of the rushing of the waters still sounded muffled and remote; as if the great river were falling, not into the chasm below, but into the very bowels of the earth, too far away from us to be seen or heard.

A fiery red sunset was burning over the green woods, and the level landscape, and the dusty roads, as we drove away back again, and down to the whirlpool below the Falls. Indeed, by the time we reached the point from which we were to descend into the gorge, the sun had gone down, the west had paled, and there was a cold twilight over the deep chasm through which the dark green river rolls. There was something very impressive in these sombre waters—their rapidity and force only marked

by the whirling by of successive pine-trees—and in the sheer precipices on each side, scarred with ruddy rocks and sunless woods. Down here, too, there were no photographs, or Indians selling sham trinkets, or museums; only the solemnity of the gathering dusk, and the awful whirling by of the sullen water, and the distant and unceasing roar. The outlines of the landscape were lost, and we began to think of the sea.

And very pleasant it was that evening to sit up in the high balcony, as the night came on and the moon rose over the dark trees, and watch the growing light touch the edge of the far-reaching falls just where the water plunged. The great pillar of foam was dark now, and the American Falls, opposite us, were no longer white, but of a mystic grey; but out there at the bend of the Horse-Shoe Falls the moonlight caught the water sharply—gleaming between the black rocks and trees of Goat Island and the black rocks and trees of the mainland.

It was a beautiful sight, calm and peaceful, and we could almost have imagined that we

were once more on the deck of the great vessel, with the placid night around us, and the sound of the waves in our ears, and Bell singing to us, "Row, brothers, row, the daylight's past." You see, no human being is ever satisfied with what is before his eyes. If he is on land, he is thinking of the sea; if he is on the sea, he is dreaming of the land. What madness possessed us in England that we should crave to see the plains of the Far West, knowing that our first thought there would be directed back to England? For Bell and her husband all this business was a duty; for us, a dream. And now that we had come to these Niagara Falls, which are famous all over the world, and now that we could sit and look at them with all the mystery and magic of a summer night around us, of what were we thinking?

"It will be beautiful up on Mickleham Downs to-night," says Bell, suddenly.

It is the belief of the present writer that every one of these senseless people was thinking of his or her home at this moment, for they set off at once to talk about Surrey as if there was

nothing in the world but that familiar English county, and you would have imagined that a stroll on Mickleham Downs, on a moonlight night, was the extreme point to which the happiness of a human being could attain.

"Lady Sylvia," says Queen T., in a gentle undertone, and she puts a kindly hand on the hand of her friend, "shall we put on our bonnets and walk over to The Lilacs now? There might be a light in the windows."

CHAPTER III.

SAMBO.

ON a blazing, hot, dry day in August, two strange creatures might have been seen carefully picking their steps down a narrow path cut in the steep precipice that overlooks the whirling and hurrying waters of Niagara. They were apparently Esquimaux; and they were attended by a third person, also apparently an Esquimaux. All three wore heavy and amorphous garments of a blue woollen stuff; but these were mostly concealed by capacious oilskins. They had yellow oilskin caps tightly strapped on their head; yellow oilskin jackets, with flapping sleeves; yellow oilskin trousers of great width but no particular shape; and shoes of felt. One of the two travellers wore—alas!—spectacles.

These heavy garments became less hot as the

Esquimaux began to receive shooting spurts of spray from the rocks overhead ; and when, following their guide, they had to stand in a shower-bath for a few seconds, while he unlocked a small and mysterious portal, the cool splashing was not all uncomfortable. But when, having passed through this gate, they had to descend some exceedingly steep and exceedingly slippery wooden steps, they discovered that even a shower-bath on a hot day may become too much of a good thing. For now they began to receive blows on the head, and blows on the shoulders, as though an avalanche of pebbles was upon them : while strange gusts of wind, blowing up from some wild cauldron below, dashed across their faces and mouths, blinding and choking them. And in the booming and thundering sound all around them, had not the taller of the two travellers to stop, and seize his companion's arm, and yell with all his might before he could be heard—

“ Donnerwetter ! what a fellow that was in the guide-book ! I will swear he never came through that gate ! He said you must take off

your collar and gloves, or you will get them wet! Ho, ho! Your collar and gloves! Ho, ho!"

But the laughter sounds wild and unearthly in the thunder of the falling waters and the pistol-shots hammering on one's head. Still further down the slippery steps go these three figures; and the roar increases; and the wild gusts rage with fiercer violence, as if they would whirl these three yellow phantoms into mid-air. The vagus nerve declares that in all its life it never was treated in this way before; for what with the booming in the ears, and the rattling on the head, and the choking of the mouth, it has got altogether bewildered. The last of the wooden steps is reached; the travellers are on slippery rocks; and now before them is a vast and gloomy cave, and there is a wild whirlpool of lashing water in it, and beyond it, between the travellers and the outside world is a blinding wall of water, torn by the winds into sheets of grey and white, and plunging down as if it would reach the very centre of the earth. The roar is indescribable. And how is it that the

rushing currents of wind invariably sweep upward, as if to fight the falling masses of white water, and go whirling a smoke of foam all about the higher reaches of this awful cavern ?

Here ensues a piteous and painful spectacle. No doubt these two travellers had gone down to this Cave of the Winds to be suitably impressed. No doubt they had read with deep attention the description of getting behind the Falls written by gentlemen who had adventured some little way behind the Horse-Shoe Falls—on the other side—and who had gone home, with damp gloves, to write an account of the business and to invoke the name of their Maker in order to give strength to their intransitive verbs. But could anything in the world be more ludicrous than the spectacle of a man, with Niagara tumbling on his head, trying to keep his spectacles dry ? It was in vain that the guide had warned him to leave these behind him. It was in vain that his companion had besought him. And there he stood, in the midst of this booming and infernal cavern, trying to get furtive snatches through his miserable spectacles by

rapidly passing over them a wet handkerchief. Then a fiercer gust than usual whirled the handkerchief out of his hand and sent it flying upwards until it disappeared in the smoke of the spray. After that, mute despair.

For now, as dumb signs declared, it was necessary to pass round the back of this wild cavern, by a narrow path between the lashing waters and the rocks; one hand on the rocks, the other gripped by the guide, the eyes keeping a sharp look-out, as far as was possible in the gloom, for one's footing. But how could this miserable creature with the swimming spectacles accomplish this feat? Blind Bartimeus would have been safer; for he, at least, would have had both hands free. It was with a piteous look that he held out the spectacles, and shook his head. The face of the attendant Esquimaux plainly said, "I told you so"—speech was impossible amid the thunder.

And now this helpless person, being left alone at the entrance to the cave, and alternating the efforts of spray-blinded eyes with quick glances through spectacles dried by a dripping

oil-skin sleeve, saw some strange things. For at first it appeared to him that there was nothing visible in the outer world but this unceasing plunge of masses of water, that crashed upon the rocks, and sprung out into mid-air, whirling about in mad fashion with the twisting hurricanes of wind. But by-and-by—and apparently immeasurable leagues away—he caught fitful glances of a faint roseate colour—a glow that seemed to have no form or substance. And then again, with the rapidity of a dream, a glimmer appeared as of sunlight on brown rocks; and for an instant he thought he saw some long wooden poles of a bright red, supported in mid-air. Was that, then, the bridge outside the Falls by which the other two phantoms were to return? But the whole thing was fleeting and unsubstantial; and again the wild grey mists closed over it; while the vagus nerve protested horribly against this perpetual hammering on the head. For a moment the frantic thought occurred to him that he would sacrifice these accursed spectacles—that he would dash them into the foaming cauldron—that he would

at all risks clamber round the black walls with both hands unencumbered. But the vagus nerve—which seems to form a sort of physical conscience—intervened. “*Think of your loving wife and tender babes,*” it said. “*Think of your duty as one of the magistrates of Surrey. Above all, consider what the wise Frenchman said, ‘When one is dead it is for a very long time;’ and cheerfully, and without a pang, sacrifice the dollars you have paid.*”

Another vision through this Walpurgis dance of waters. Far away—as if another world altogether was revealing itself—two figures appeared in mid-air, and they seemed to be clambering along by the rose-red poles. But there was no substance in them. They were as aerial as the vapour through which they faintly gleamed. They passed on, apparently descending towards certain phantasmal shadows that may have been rocks; and were seen no more.

It was about ten minutes thereafter that the wooden portal above was re-opened; and the three Esquimaux, dripping inside and out, stood in the dry air. And now it seemed as if the

great landscape around was dyed in the intensest colours; and the eyes, long harassed by these bewildering greys and whites, roved in a delighted manner over the ruddy rocks, and the green woods, and the blue of the skies. And the hot air was no longer too hot after this mighty shower-bath; while the Lieutenant, his face glowing after the wet, and his beard in twisted and flaky tangles, was declaring that the passage along these slippery boards was about as bad as the Mauvais Pas. Was it to flatter him—as every captain is ready to flatter his passengers on getting them into port by telling them he has not experienced such a storm for five-and-twenty years—that the attendant Esquimaux observed that it was an unusually bad day for the Cave, owing to the direction of the wind? In any case, the Lieutenant answered, it was a good thing he had not asked any of his lady friends to accompany him.

But of course these gentle creatures insisted on going down to the old and familiar passage behind the Horse-Shoe Falls which has been the theme of much eloquent writing; and ac-

cordingly, in the afternoon, we all went along to a big building that reminded us at once of Chamounix, so crammed was it with photographs, trinkets, guides, and tourists. Here, for a trifling charge, we were accommodated with a few loose waterproofs to throw over our ordinary costumes; and thus attired we crossed the road and struck down the narrow and sloppy path leading to the Falls. We would have no guide. If there was a guide at all, it was a courageous person who had boldly left his spectacles in the building above, and had sworn—in his purblind state—to accomplish this desperate enterprise, or perish in the attempt. Undaunted, he and his companions passed by several ladies who were busy making water-colour drawings—having cunningly chosen positions where they could get a good lump of red rock and some bushes for their foreground. Undaunted, they met the preliminary challenges—as it were—of the Horse-Shoe Falls in the shape of little spouts of water; in fact, these were only the playful and capricious attentions that Undine's knight received when her uncle

was in a good humour and attended him through the gloomy forest. These spouts and jets increased to a shower; and the path grew narrower, so that we had to exercise some caution in allowing returning explorers to pass us—more especially as we were shod, not in gripping felt, but in goloshes of enormous size. But what of that? We should have pressed forward, if each foot had been in a canoe.

And it was shameful to see at this time how the Lieutenant paid almost no heed at all to his wife—to the mother of his children—to the friendless and forlorn creature who had been banished from her native land; but almost exclusively devoted himself to Lady Sylvia, whom he led in the van of the party. Not only did he give her his hand at all the narrow places; but even, in order to do so, was bold enough to venture outside on the broken and brittle slate, in a fashion which no father of a family should permit himself. But as for Bell, she was not born in Westmoreland for nothing. She walked along this ledge as freely and carelessly as if she had been walking in Oxford Street. When

she looked down the sheer precipice, it was only to admire the beautiful colours of the green water, here swirling in great circles of foam. We firmly believed that she was singing aloud the mermaid's song in "Oberon;" but of course we could not hear her.

For now the booming of the Falls was close at hand; and we found in front of us a ledge or plateau running away in between the high wall of rock and the mighty masses of water shooting downwards in a confusion of mist and spray. One by one we entered into this twilit hall of the water-gods; and, after trying to overmaster or get accustomed to the thundering roar, placed our backs to the rocks and confronted the spectacle before us. What was it, then? Only perpetual downward streaks of grey; a slight upward motion, as if the wind was fraying the surface of these masses; a confused whirling overhead of grey vapour; and at our feet a narrow ledge of black and crumbling rock that trembled with the reverberation of the crash below. The strange twilight of this hall of waters was certainly impressive; and there was

something in our enforced silence, and in the shaking of the ground on which we stood, to add to the impression. Here, too, there were none of the fierce hurricane-gusts of the "Cave of the Winds" to buffet the eyes and choke the mouth and nostrils. Nor had the vagus nerve to contend with the hammering of tongs on the head. No doubt, a cultivator of the emotions might come down here with a fair presumption that beautiful feelings would arise within him. He might even bring a chair with him, and sit down and wait for them. And when he clambered up into the dry air again, he would find himself none the worse, except, perhaps, that his gloves might be damp.

But onwards—onwards. The goal has to be reached: let those whose vagus nerve remonstrates remain behind. And now the darkness increases somewhat; and the narrow ledge, rising and falling, and twisting round the edge of the rocks, is like a black snake at one's feet; and the wind and water around one's face seem more inextricably mixed than ever. But has the world come to an end? Have the rocks,

too, been mixed up with the vapour? Have we got to the verge of the visible universe, to find ourselves confronted by nothing but misty phantoms? Suddenly one feels a hand on one's shoulder. With caution, and a tight grip, one turns. And what is this wild thing gleaming through the grey vapour—a great, black face, shining and smiling and dripping, brilliant rows of teeth, and coal-black eyes? And what is this that he yells high and clear—so that it is heard even through the roar and thunder around—“*You kent go no forder den dawt!*” ’Tis well, friend—Sambo, or Potiphar, or whatever you may be. You are very like the devil, down here, in this wild place; but there has been a mistake about the element. ’Tis well, nevertheless; and a half-dollar shall be thine, when we get back to dry air and daylight.

Our women-folk were greatly pleased with this excursion; and began to assume superior airs. At dinner there was a wild and excited talk of the fearful things they had seen and done—a jumble of maddened horses, runaway coaches, sinking boats, and breaking ice—so

that you would have thought that such an assemblage of daring spirits had never met before under one roof.

“These are pleasant things to hear of,” it is remarked, “especially for the father of a family. When one listens to such pranks and escapes on the part of respectable married people, one begins to wonder what is likely to be happening to two harum-scarum boys. I have no doubt that at this moment they are hewing off their thumbs with jack-knives; and trying to hang the pony up to a tree; and loading the gardener’s gun with four pounds of powder and three marbles. What do you say, Bell?”

“I have no doubt they are all asleep,” answered that practical young matron, who has never been able to decide whether American time is before English time, or the reverse.

Well, we got our letters at Niagara; and were then free to set out for the Far West. There was nothing in these letters but the usual domestic tidings. Lord Willowby expressed surprise to his daughter that Balfour

should intend, as he understood, to remain in London during the autumn ; that was all the mention of her husband that Lady Sylvia received. Whether she brooded over it, can only be conjectured ; but to all eyes it was clear that she was not at this time solely occupied in thinking about Niagara.

Our favourite points of view had by this time come to be certain chosen spots on the American side, close by those immense bodies of green water that came gliding on so swiftly and smoothly, that fell away into soft traceries of white as the wind caught their surface, and that left behind them, as they plunged into the unknown gulf below, showers of diamonds that gleamed in the sun as they remained suspended in the upward currents of air. But perhaps our last view was the finest of all, and that as we were leaving, from the Canadian side. The clear blue day was suddenly clouded over by a thunderstorm. Up out of the south-west came rolling masses of cloud, and these threw an awful gloom over the plain of waters above the Falls, while the narrow neck of land adjacent

was as black as night. Then from a break in these sombre clouds one gleam of light fell flashing on the very centre of the Horse-Shoe Falls—the wonderful green shining out more brilliantly than ever; while nearer at hand one or two random shafts of light struck down on the white foam that was whirling onwards into the dark gorge. That was our final glimpse of Niagara; but perhaps not the one that will remain longest in the memory. Surely we had no intention of weaving anything comic or fantastic into our notion of Niagara when we went down that dripping path on the hot August afternoon. But now we often talk of Sambo—if such was his name—of the tall and dusky demon who burst upon us through floating clouds of vapour. Does he still haunt that watery den—a gloomy shape—yet not awful, but rather kind-hearted and smiling, in the midst of these unsubstantial visions? Or have the swift waters seized him, long ago, and whirled him away beyond the reach of human eyes and ears?

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLLAPSE.

LORD WILLOWBY had heard of the arrival of his son-in-law at The Lilacs ; and on the following morning he drove over to see if he were still there. He found Balfour alone ; Mr. Bolitho having gone up to town by an early train.

“What a lucky chance !” said Lord Willowby, with one of his sudden and galvanic smiles. “If you have nothing better to do, why not go on with me to The Hollow ; you know this is the first day of the sale there.”

“Well, yes, I will go over with you for an hour or so ; I need not be up in town before the afternoon,” answered Balfour. “And I should like to see how that fellow lived.”

He certainly did not propose to himself to buy any second-hand chairs, books, or candlesticks at this sale ; nor did he imagine that his

father-in-law had much superfluous cash to dispose of in that way. But he had some curiosity to see what sort of house this was that had had lately for its occupant a person who had given rise to a good deal of gossip in that neighbourhood. He was a man who had suddenly inherited a large fortune; and who had set to work to spend it lavishly. His reputation and habits being a trifle "off colour," as the phrase is, he had fallen back for companionship on a number of parasitical persons, who doubtless earned a liberal commission on the foolish purchases they induced him to make. Then this Surrey Sardanapalus, having surrounded himself with all the sham gorgeousness he could think of, proceeded to put an end to himself by means of brandy-and-soda. He effected his purpose in a short time; and that is all that need here be said of him.

It was a pitiable sight enough—this great, castellated, beplastered, ostentatious house, that had a certain gloom and isolation about it, handed over to the occupancy of a cheerfully inquisitive crowd, who showed no hesitation

at all in fingering over the dead man's trinkets, and opening his desks and cabinets. His very clothes were hanging up there, in a ghastly row, each article numbered off as a lot. In the room in which he had but recently died, a fine, tall, fresh-coloured farmer—dressed for the occasion in broadcloth—was discussing with his wife what price the bedstead would probably fetch. And there was a bar; with sherry and sandwiches. And on the lawn outside, the auctioneer had put up his tent; and the flag erected over the tent was of the gayest colours.

Lord Willowby and Balfour strolled through these rooms, both forbearing to say what they thought of all this tawdry magnificence—panelings of blue silk and silver, with a carpet of pink roses on a green ground—candelabra, costing £1800, the auctioneer's reserve price on which was £300—improvised ancestors, at a guinea a head, looking out of gorgeous frames—and so forth, and so forth. They glanced at the catalogue occasionally. It was an imposing volume; and the descriptions of the contents of the house were almost poetical.

"Look at the wines," said Lord Willowby, with a compassionate smile. "The claret is nearly all Lafitte. I suppose those toadies of his have supplied him with a *vin ordinaire* at 120 shillings a dozen."

"I should not be surprised if a lot of these spurious things sold for more than he gave for them," Balfour said. "You will find people imagining everything to be fine because a rich man bought it. That claret would fetch a high price, depend on it, if it was all labelled 'Château Wandsworth.'"

Then there was the ringing of a bell; and the people began to stream out of the house into the marquee; and the auctioneer had an improvised rostrum put up for himself at the end of the long table; and then the bare-armed men began to carry out the various articles to be bid for. It was soon very evident that prices were running high. No doubt the farmers about would be proud to show to their friends a dispatch-box, a birdcage, a hall-table—anything that had belonged to the owner of The Hollow. And so the ostentatious trash,

that even Tottenham Court Road would have been ashamed of, was carried piecemeal out into the light of the day; and in some instances these simple folk considered it to be so beautiful that a murmur of admiration ran round the tent when the things were brought in. It was altogether a melancholy sight.

Balfour had accompanied Lord Willowby, solely from the fact of his having an idle forenoon to dispose of; but he could not quite make out what his father-in-law's purpose was in coming here. For one thing, he appeared to be quite indifferent about the sale itself. He had listened to one or two of the biddings; and then—saying that the prices were ridiculously high—had proposed a further stroll through the rooms. So they entered the house again; and had another look at the old masters (dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century) and at the trumpery gilt and satin.

“Ah, well, Balfour,” said Lord Willowby, with a pensive air, “one can almost pity that poor fellow, having his house overhauled by strangers in this way. Fortunately he knows

nothing about it. It must be much worse when you are alive and know what is going on; and I fancy—well, perhaps, there is no use speaking of it—but I suppose I must go through it. What distresses me most is the thought of these merry people who are here to-day going through my daughter's room—and pulling about her few little treasures that she did not take with her when she married——”

Lord Willowby stopped; doubtless overcome by emotion. But Balfour—with a face that had flushed at this sudden mention of Lady Sylvia—turned to him with a stare of surprise.

“What do you mean, Lord Willowby?”

“Well,” said his lordship, with a resigned air, “I suppose I must come to this, too. I don't see how I can hold on at the Hall any longer—I am wearing my life out with anxiety——”

“You don't mean to say you are going to sell Willowby Hall?”

“How can I help it? And even then I don't know whether I shall clear the mortgages——”

“Come,” said Balfour, for there were several of the auctioneer's men about, “let us go out

into the garden, and have a talk about this business."

They went out. It did not occur to Balfour why Lord Willowby had been so anxious for him to come to this sale; nor did he consider how skilfully that brief allusion to Lady Sylvia's room in her old home had been brought in. He was really alarmed by this proposal. He knew the grief it would occasion to his wife; he knew, too, that in the opinion of the world the public humiliation would in a measure reflect on himself. He remonstrated severely with Lord Willowby. What good could be gained by this step? If he could not afford to live at the Hall, why not let it for a term of years, and go up to London to live, or—if the shooting of rabbits was a necessity—to some smaller place in the country? And what sum would relieve his present needs, and also put him in a fair way of pulling his finances together again? He hoped Lord Willowby would speak frankly; as no good ever came of concealing parts of the truth.

That Lord Willowby did disclose the whole

truth it would be rash to assert; but at all events, his dramatic little scheme worked so well that, before that talk and walk in the grounds of The Hollow were over, Balfour had promised to make him an immediate advance of £10,000, not secured by any mortgage whatever, but merely to be acknowledged by note of hand. Lord Willowby was profoundly grateful. He explained, with some dignity, that he was a man of few words; and did not care to express all his feelings; but that he would not soon forget this urgently needed help. And as to the urgency of the help he made one or two references.

"I think I might be able to see my partners this afternoon," Balfour said in reply. "Then we should only have to step across to our solicitors. There need be no delay—if you are really pressed for the money."

"My dear fellow," said Lord Willowby, "you don't know what a load you have taken from my breast. I would have sold the Hall long ago, but for Sylvia's sake—I know it would break her heart. I will write out at once to her to say how kind you have been——"

"I hope you will not do that," Balfour said suddenly. "The fact is—well—these business matters are better kept amongst men. She would be disturbed and anxious. Pray don't say anything about it."

"As you please," Lord Willowby said. "But I know when she comes back she won't be sorry to find the old Hall awaiting her. It will be her own in the natural course of things—perhaps sooner than any one expects."

It was strange that a man who had just been presented with £10,000, should begin to indulge in these melancholy reflections; but then Lord Willowby had obviously been impressed by this sad sight of the sale; and it was with almost a dejected air that he consented—seeing that his son-in-law would now have no time to get luncheon anywhere before leaving by the mid-day train—to go to the refreshment-bar and partake of such humble cheer as was there provided. It was not the dead man's sherry they drank, but that of the refreshment contractor. They stood for a few moments there, listening to the eager comments of one or two people

who had been bidding for a box of games (it cost £10, and went for £23,) and a cockatoo; and then Lord Willowby had the horses put to, and himself drove Balfour all the way to the station. He shook hands with him warmly. He begged of him not to hurry or bother about this matter; but still—at the same time—if there was no obstacle in the way—it was always comforting to have such things settled quickly—and so forth.

Balfour got up to London, and went straight to the offices of his firm in the City. Perhaps he was not sorry to make the visit just at this juncture; for although it would be exaggeration to say that the hints dropped by Bolitho had disquieted him, they had nevertheless remained in his mind. Before this, too, it had sometimes occurred to him that he ought to take a greater interest in that vast commercial system which it had been the pride of his father's life to build up. It seemed almost ungrateful that he should limit his interference to a mere glance at the Profit and Loss and Capital accounts. But then, on the other hand, it was his own father who

had taught him to place implicit confidence in his carefully chosen partners.

Balfour was shown upstairs to Mr. Skinner's room. That gentleman was sitting alone, at his desk, with some letters before him. He was a small, prim, elderly, and precisely-dressed person, with grey whiskers, and a somewhat careworn face. When Balfour entered, he smiled cheerfully, and nodded towards a chair.

"Ah, how do you do, Balfour? What's new with you? Anything going on at the House? I wish Parliament would do something for us business men."

"You have plenty of representatives there, anyhow, Mr. Skinner," said Balfour—the "Mr." was a tradition from his boyish visits to the office, when the young gentleman used to regard his father's partners with considerable awe—"But at present my call is a personal and private one. The fact is, I want to oblige a particular friend of mine—I want you to let me have £10,000 at once."

"£10,000? Oh, yes, I think we can manage that," said Mr. Skinner, with a pleasant smile.

The thing was quite easily and cheerfully settled; and Balfour proceeded to chat about one or two other matters to this old friend of his, whom he had not seen for some time. But he soon perceived that Mr. Skinner was not hearing one word he said. Moreover, a curious grey look had come over his face.

"You don't look very well," said the blunt-spoken young man.

"Oh yes, thank you," said Mr. Skinner, quite brightly. "I was only thinking—since you were here anyway—we might have a short talk about business matters, if Mr. Green agrees. I will see whether he is in his room."

He rose, opened the door, and went out. Balfour thought to himself that poor old Skinner was aging fast; he seemed quite frail on his legs.

Mr. Skinner was gone for fully ten minutes, and Balfour was beginning to wonder what could have occurred, when the two partners entered together. He shook hands with Mr. Green—a taller and stouter man, with a sallow face and spectacles. They all sat down; and,

despite himself, Balfour began to entertain suspicions that something was wrong. Why all this nervousness and solemnity?

“Balfour,” said Mr. Skinner, “Green and I are agreed. We must tell you now how we stand; and you have to prepare yourself for a shock. We have kept you in ignorance all this time—we have kept our own clerks in ignorance—hoping against hope—fearful of any human being letting the secret go out and ruin us; and now—now it is useless any longer——”

It was no ordinary thing that had so disturbed this prim old man. His lips were so dry that he could scarcely speak. He poured out a glass of water, and drank a little. Meanwhile, Balfour, who merely expected to hear of heavy business-losses, was sitting calm and unimpressed.

“But first of all, Mr. Green, you know,” said he, “don’t think that I am pressing you for this £10,000. Of course, I would rather have it; but if it is necessary to you——”

“£10,000!” exclaimed the wretched old man, with the frankness and energy of despair,

“if we go into the *Gazette*, it will be for half a million!”

The *Gazette*! The word was a blow; and he sat stunned and bewildered, while both partners were eagerly explaining the desperate means that had been taken to avoid this fatal issue, and the preliminary causes, stretching back for several years. He could not understand. It was as if in a dream that he heard of the Investments Account, of the China Capital Account, of the fall in property in Shanghai, of speculations in cotton, of bill transactions on the part of the younger partners, of this frantic effort and that. It was the one word *Gazette* that kept dinning itself into his ears. And then he seemed to make a wild effort to throw off this nightmare.

“But how can it be!” he cried. “How can these things have been going on? Every six months I have looked over the Profit and Loss Account——”

The old man came over, and took his hand in both of his. There were tears in his eyes.

"Balfour," said he, "your father and I were old friends while you were only a child; if he were alive, he would tell you that we acted justly. We dared not let you know. We dared not let our own clerks know. We had to keep accounts open under fictitious names; if we had written off these fearful losses to Profit and Loss we should have been smashed a year ago. And now—I don't think any further concealment is possible——"

He let the hand fall.

"Then I understand you that we are hopelessly bankrupt," said Balfour.

He did not answer; his silence was enough.

"You mean that I have not a farthing," repeated the younger man.

"You have the money that was settled on your wife," said Mr. Skinner, eagerly. "I was very glad when you applied for that——"

"It will be returned to you; I cannot defraud my father's creditors," said Balfour, coldly.

And then he rose; no one could have told what he had undergone during that half-hour.

"Good-bye, Mr. Skinner; good-bye, Mr.

Green," said he. "I can scarcely forgive you for keeping me in ignorance of all this, though doubtless you did it for the best. And when is the crash to be announced?"

"Now that we have seen you, I think we might as well call in our solicitors at once," said Mr. Skinner.

"I think so too," said the other partner; and then Balfour left.

He plunged into the busy, eager world outside; the office-boy was whistling merrily as he passed, the cabmen bandying jokes, smart young clerks hurrying over the latter part of their duties to get home to their amusements in the suburbs. He walked all the way down to the House, and quite mechanically took his seat. He dined by himself—with singular abstemiousness, but then no one was surprised at that. And then he walked up to his house in Piccadilly.

And this was the end—the end of all those fine ambitions that had floated before his mind as he left college, equipped for the struggle of public life with abundant health, and strength,

and money, and courage. Had his courage, then, fled with his wealth, that now he seemed altogether stunned by this sudden blow? Or was it rather that, in other circumstances, he might have encountered this calamity with tolerable firmness; but that now, and at the same time, he found himself ruined, forsaken, and alone.

CHAPTER V.

A FLASH OF NEWS.

WE dragged a lengthening chain. As soon as we had left Niagara and its hotels and holiday-making, and plunged into that interminable forest-land that lies between Lakes Huron and Erie, one could have noticed that the gravity of our women-folk was visibly increased. Did they half expect, then—while they were idling about these show-places—some sudden summons, which they could readily answer? Bell, at least, could have no such hope; but all the same, as this big and ornate car was quietly gliding away westward, in the direction of her future home, she was as sad as any of them.

What was the matter? It was a beautiful afternoon. The country through which we were passing was sufficiently cheerful; for this forest

was not dark, gloomy, and monotonous like the Schwarzwald, but, on the contrary, bright, varied in hue, and broken up by innumerable clearances. Every few minutes the window next us became the frame of a pleasant little picture—the sudden open space among the trees; a wooden house set amid orchards in which the ruddy apples showed in the evening light; a drove of cattle homeward-going along the rough road; tall silver-grey stems of trees that had been left when the wood was burned down; and everywhere—in every available corner—maize, maize, maize.

“What is the matter?” says the German lieutenant to his wife, who is gazing somewhat absently out of the window.

“I know,” says Queen T., with a gentle smile. “She is thinking how she could ever make her way back through this perpetual forest if she were all by herself and with no road to guide her. Fancy Bell wandering on day and night—always towards the East—towards her children. She might take some food from the country-people; but she would not enter their houses;

she would go on, day after day, night after night, until she got to the sea. And you want to know what she is thinking of now? I believe she is consumed with hatred of everything lying westward of the river Mole; and that she considers the Pullman car a detestable invention. That is the pretty result of Colonel Sloane's ingenuity!"

It certainly was not fair to talk in this slighting fashion of poor old Five-Ace Jack, who was but recently dead, and who had done what he considered his best with such worldly possessions as Providence had allowed him to thieve and amass. But at this moment the lieutenant struck in.

"Oh, that is quite foolish!" he cried. "There is no longer any such thing as distance—it is only time. It is foolish to think of the distance between the Rocky Mountains and Surrey; it is only how many days; and you may as well be living in a pleasant car, and having good food, and very capital beds, as in a hotel, while all the time you are travelling. And indeed," continued this young man, seriously addressing

his wife, "there is very little difference of time either now. You want to speak to your children? You speak to them through the telegraph. It is an hour or two—it is nothing. In the morning you send them a message—you say 'How do you do?'—in the evening, as you sit down to dinner, you have the answer. What is that separation? It is nothing."

"I think," says Bell, with savage ferocity, but with tears springing to her eyes. "I will spend the whole of the first year's income of this wretched property in telegrams to the children. One might just as well be dead as living without them."

And if she was to derive any comfort from this reflection that the telegraph was a constant link of communication between herself and those young folks left behind in Surrey, she was not likely to be allowed to forget the fact for any length of time. Even out in this forest wilderness the most prominent feature of the smallest hamlet we passed was its telegraph posts and wires. Very plain, unpretending, unpicturesque hamlets these were—even in the

ruddy glow now shining over the land. They consisted of a number of wooden shanties all set down in rectangular rows—the thoroughfares being exceedingly broad and bare—the whole place having an oddly improvised and temporary look, as if the houses and shops could in a few minutes be put on wheels and carried along to the next clearance in the forest. But what could even the smallest of these hereto-day-and-gone-to-morrow-looking places want with such a multiplicity of telegraph-wires?

That night the three women, having been bundled into the prettily-decorated state-room that had been secured for them, and being now doubtless fast asleep, saw nothing of a strange thing that occurred to us. Had Von Rosen gone mad, or had the phrase “state-room” confused his fancies, that, looking out of the car-window, he suddenly declared we were at sea? Rubbing his eyes—perhaps he had been dozing a bit—he insisted on it. Then he must needs hurry out to the little iron gangway at the end of the car, to see if his senses were forsaking him.

Here, certainly, a strange sight was visible.

We were no doubt standing on a railroad-car ; but all around us there was nothing but black and lapping water through which we were rapidly moving, propelled by some unknown power. And the blackness of this mysterious lake or sea was intensified by the flashing down on the waves of one or two distant lights that seemed to be high above any possible land. Then, as our eyes became accustomed to the darkness, lo ! another phenomenon—a great black mass, like a portion of a city, moving after us through the night. We began to make it out at last. The bewildering lights ahead were two lofty beacons. We were crossing a lake, or a bit of a lake. The long train had been severed into lengths ; and each portion of the huge serpent placed on a gigantic steam ferry-boat which was taking us across the black waters. And when this night-passage ceased, we scarcely knew whether we were on sea or on shore, whether on a boat or a line of rail. But people began to talk about Detroit ; and here undoubtedly was a railway-station, to say nothing of a refreshment-bar.

"I believe we have got into the States again," observed the lieutenant, thereby showing a knowledge of geography which was not surprising in a German.

Next morning our little party had most obviously improved in spirits. Perhaps there was some secret hope among the women-folk that they would have further news from England when they arrived at Chicago; though what good could come of that it was hard to say. Or perhaps they were delighted to find that they had suffered no discomfort at all in passing a night on board a railway-train. They praised everything—the cleanness and comfort of the beds—the handiness of the lavatories—the civility of the attendants. There was no fatigue at all visible in their fresh and bright faces. And when they sate down to breakfast, it was quite clear that they meant to make it a comic breakfast; whereas breakfast in an American railway-car is a serious business, to be conducted with circumspection and with due regard for contingencies. For one thing, the hospitable board is not spacious; and with even the most

smoothly going of cars there are occasional swayings which threaten peril to coffee-cups. But the chief occasion for fear arises from the fact that your travelling American is a curious person, and insists on experimenting upon every possible form of food that the districts through which he is passing produce. Moreover, he has a sumptuous eye; and likes to have all these things spread out before him at once. No matter how simple the central dish may be—a bit of a prairie-chicken, for example, or a slice of pork—he must have it, perhaps merely for the delight of colour, graced by a semi-circle of dishes containing varied and variously prepared vegetables. Now we never could get the most intelligent of negroes to understand that we were only plain country folk, unaccustomed to such gorgeous displays and varieties of things, and not at all desirous of eating at one and the same time boiled beans, beet-root in vinegar, green corn, squash, and sweet potatoes. Sambo would insist on our having all these things, and more; and could not be got to believe that we could get through breakfast without an assort-

ment of boiled trout, pork and apple sauce, and prairie chicken. The consequence was that this overloaded small table not unfrequently reminded one or two of us of certain experiences in northern climes, when the most frugal banquet—down in that twilit saloon—was attended by the most awful anxiety.

“She pitches a good deal,” said Bell, raising her cup so as to steady it the better, “the sea must be getting rougher.”

“Madame Columbus,” asked the lieutenant, “when shall we come in sight of land? The provisions will be running short soon. I have never seen people eat as these people eat—it is the fine air, is it not?”

“Mr. von Rosen,” said Lady Sylvia, “do you know that you can have Milwaukee lager beer on board this ship?”

“Do I know?” said the young man, modestly. “Oh, yes, I know. I had some this morning at seven o’clock.” And then he turned to his shocked wife, “I was very thirsty; and I do not like that water of melted ice.”

He would have explained further; but that

his wife intimates that such excuses are unnecessary. She has got used to this kind of thing. Happily her children are now beyond the sphere of his evil example.

"Ah," said he, "this is all very poor and wretched as yet—this crossing of the American continent. I am a prophet. I can see the things that will come. Why have we not here the saloon that we have across the Atlantic—with a piano? I would sing you a song, Lady Sylvia."

"Indeed," said that lady, very sweetly, "you are very kind."

"But it is a long time ago since we used to have songs in our travelling. I can remember when we had to try a new piano every day—some of them very queer; but always in any case we had the guitar, and 'Woodstock Town' and 'The Flowers of the Forest'——"

"And '*Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter*,'" says Bell, in a suddenly deep and tragical voice, "*wollt' dem Kaiser wiedrum krrrrrrrrriegen Stadt und Festung Belga-rrrrrrr-ad!*"

"Ah, Bell," says Queen T., "do you remember that morning at Bourton-on-the-Hill?"

Did she remember that morning at Bourton-on-the-Hill! Did she remember that bunch of fiddlesticks! No doubt they were very pleased to get away from the small inn where they had had ham, and eggs, and whiskey for supper, and ham, and eggs, and tea for breakfast; but here, in this bountiful and beneficent land, flowing over with broiled bluefish, Carolina widgeon, marrow squash, and Lima beans, what was the use of thinking about Bourton-on-the-Hill and its belongings? I do not believe we were charged more than a shilling per head for our lodging in that Worcestershire hostelry; here we were in a country where we could pay if we chose a couple of shillings extra for having a bottle of wine iced. And, if it came to that, what fresher morning could we have had anywhere than this that now shone all around us? We dragged these nostalgic persons out on to the pleasant little iron balcony at the end of the car. There had been a good deal of rain for some time before; so there was little dust. And what could be brighter and pleasanter than these fair blue skies, and the green woods, and

the sweet, cool winds that blew about and tempered the heat of the sun? We seemed to be rolling onward through a perpetual forest, along a pathway of flowers. Slowly as the train went, we could not quite make out these tall blossoms by the side of the track; except to guess that the yellow blooms were some sort of marigold or sun-flower, and the purple ones probably a valerian, while the rich tones of brownish-red that occurred among the green were doubtless those of some kind of rumex. And all through this forest-country were visible the symptoms of a busy and shifty industry. Clearing followed clearing, with its enclosures of split rails to keep the cattle from wandering; with its stock of felled timber close to the house; and with, everywhere, the golden-yellow pumpkins gleaming in the sunlight between the rows of the grey-green maize.

“What a lonely life these people must lead,” said Lady Sylvia, as we stood there.

“Yes, indeed,” responded her monitress. “They are pretty nearly as far removed from telegraphs, and newspapers, and neighbours as

we are in Surrey. But no doubt they are content—as we might be, if we had any sense. But if the newspaper is ten minutes late, or the fire not quite bright in the breakfast-room——”

“Or the temper of the mistress of the house,” says another voice, “of such a demoniacal complexion that the very mice are afraid of her——”

“—— then, no doubt, we think we are the most injured beings on earth. Oh, by the way, Lady Sylvia, how did your dado of Indian matting look?”

This was a sudden change; and, strangely enough, Lady Sylvia seemed rather embarrassed as she answered.

“I think it turned out very well,” said she, meekly.

“I suppose some of your guests were rather surprised,” is the next remark.

“Perhaps so,” answers the young wife evasively. “You know we never have given many dinner-parties in Piccadilly. I—I think it is so much better for my husband to get into the country whenever he can get away from the House.”

“Oh, yes, no doubt,” says Queen T., with much simplicity. “No doubt. But you know you are very singular in your tastes, Lady Sylvia. I don’t know many women who would spend the season in Surrey, if they had the chance of spending it in Piccadilly. And what did you say those flowers were?”

Our attention was soon to be called away from the flowers. The forest became scantier and scantier—finally it disappeared altogether. In its place we found a succession of low and smooth sand-hills—of a brilliant yellowish-brown in this warm sunlight, and dotted here and there with a few scrubby bushes. This was rather an odd thing to find in the midst of a forest; and we were regarding these low-lying mounds with some interest when, suddenly, they dipped. And lo! in the dip a dark blue line—and that the line of the horizon. The sea!—we cried. Who can imagine the surprise and delight of finding this vast plain of water before the eyes, after the perpetual succession of tree-stems that had confronted us since the previous morning? And surely this blue plain

was indeed the sea ; for far away we could pick out large schooners apparently hovering in the white light, and nearer at hand were smart little yachts, with the sunlight on their sails.

“ Madame Columbus,” cried the lieutenant, “ have we crossed the continent already ? Is it the Pacific out there ? ”

“ Why, you know,” says the great geographer with a curtness unworthy of her historic name and fame. “ It is Lake Michigan. It is a mere pond. It is only about as long as from London to Carlisle ; and about as broad as— let me see—as Scotland, from the Clyde to the Forth.”

It was a beautiful sight, however insignificant the size of the lake may have been. Nothing could have been more intensely blue than the far horizon line, just over those smooth and sun-lit sand-hills. No doubt, had we been on a greater height we should have caught the peculiar green colour of the water. Any one, who has unexpectedly come in view of the sea in driving over a high-lying country—say in crossing the high moors between Launceston and

Boscastle—must have been startled by the height of the suddenly revealed horizon-line. It seems to jump up to meet him like the pavement in the story of the bemuddled person. But down here on this low level we had necessarily a low horizon-line; and what we lost in intrinsic colour we gained in that deep reflected blue that was all the stronger by reason of the yellow glow of the sand-hills.

We got into Michigan City. We were offered newspapers. We refused these—for should we not have plenty of time in Chicago to read not only the newspapers, from which we expected nothing, but also our letters from England, from which we expected everything? As it turned out, there was nothing at all of importance in our letters; whereas, if we had taken these newspapers, we could not fail to have noticed the brief telegraphic announcement—which had been sent all over the commercial world—of the suspension of the well-known firm of Balfour, Skinner, Green, & Co., liabilities £500,000. In happy ignorance we travelled on.

It was about mid-day, after skirting the

southern shores of Lake Michigan through a curiously swampy country, that we entered Chicago, and drove to the very biggest of its big hotels.

CHAPTER VI.

CULTURE.

WE knew nothing of this dire announcement, though it was in every one of the newspapers published in Chicago that day. We were full of curiosity about this wonderful city that had sprung up like Jonah's gourd ; and as we drove through its busy thoroughfares—the huge blocks of buildings looking like the best parts of Glasgow indefinitely extended—and as we saw the smoky sky over our head streaked in every direction with a black, rectangular spider's-web of telegraphic wires—and as we caught glimpses at the end of the long thoroughfares of the tall masts of ships—we knew that we had indeed reached the great commercial capital of the Far West. And indeed we very speedily found that the genius of this big, eager, ostentatious place

was too strong for us. We began to revel in the sumptuousness of the vast and garishly-furnished hotels; we wanted more gilding, more marble, more gaudy colouring of acanthus leaves. A wild desire possessed us to purchase on speculation all the empty lots available; we would cover every frontage foot with gold, and laugh at all the assessments that were ever levied. Look at this spacious park on the south side of the town; shall we not have a mansion here more gorgeous than the mind of man can conceive, with horses to shoot along these wide drives like a flash of lightning? We began to entertain a sort of contempt for the people living on the north side of the town. It was hinted to us that they gave themselves airs. They read books, and talked criticism. They held aloof from ordinary society—looked on a prominent civic official as a mere shyster—and would have nothing to do with a system of local government controlled by 30,000 bummers, loafers, and dead-beats. Now we condemned this false pride. We gloried in our commercial enterprise. We wanted to astound

the world. Culture? This was what we thought about culture:—"It is with a still more sincere regret that the friends of a manly, vigorous, self-supporting and self-dependent people, fitted for the exercise of political liberty, see that the branches of culture called blacksmithing, corn-growing, carpentering, millinery, bread-making, &c., are not included in the course of studies prescribed for the Chicago public schools. Society is vastly more concerned in the induction of its youthful members into these branches of culture than it is in teaching them to bawl harmoniously and beat the hewgag melodiously." Yes, indeed. Confound their hewgags, and all other relics of an effete civilization! And again:—"This city, and every other American city, is crowded with young persons of both sexes that have been 'cultured' by a vicious and false public school system in music, drawing, and other fanciful and fashionable but practically useless arts, but that are actually incapable, by reason of their gross ignorance, of earning an honest living. They have acquired, under some well-paid 'professor' (who has bam-

boozled himself into the erroneous belief that he and his profession are necessary to the existence of society) some smattering of 'musical culture,' pencil sketching, etc., but of the practical arts and sciences of living and getting a living they are more profoundly ignorant than South-African Hottentots." What would our friends on the north side say to that?

"Bell," said the lieutenant, as we were driving through this spacious southern park, in the clear light of the afternoon, "I suppose that we shall be allowed to come up here occasionally from the ranch—what do you say?—for a frolic, and for to spend a little money? I would like to have one of these little traps—it is like the ghost of a trap—*hé!* look at that fellow now!"

We looked at him as well as we could; but he had flashed by before we could quite make out what he was sitting on. In fact there was nothing visible of the vehicle but two large and phantom wheels and a shaft like a prolonged spider's leg; while the driver, with his hands stretched forward, and his feet shot out before him, and therefore almost bent double, was ac-

according to all appearance clinging on as if for dear life to the horse's tail.

"It would be very fine to go whizzing through the air like that—and very good exercise for the arms, too ——"

"But where should I be?" asked his wife, with some indignation. Certainly a vehicle that seemed to have no inside at all—that appeared to be the mere simulacrum of a vehicle—could not very well contain two.

"Where would you be?" said the lieutenant, innocently. "It is Chicago. You would be divorced."

It was this recalling of the divorce-business that led us to see the announcement of the failure of Messrs. Balfour and Co. To tell the truth, we were not much interested in American politics; and while there were plenty of new things to be seen everywhere around us, we did not spend much time over the papers. But on this evening Queen T. had got hold of one of the daily journals to look at the advertisements about divorce. She read one or two aloud to us.

"There, you see," she remarked, addressing Bell more particularly, "you can run up here from the ranch any time you like and become a free woman. 'Residence not material.' 'Affidavits sufficient proof.' 'No charge unless successful.' And the only ground that needs to be stated is the safe one of incompatibility. So that whenever husband and wife have a quarrel, here is the remedy. It is far more swift than trying to make up the quarrel again."

"And a good deal more pleasant, too," remarks a humble voice.

Whither this idle talk might have led us need not now be guessed. The little woman's face suddenly grew ghastly pale. Her eye had been carelessly wandering away from that advertising column and had lit on the telegram announcing the suspension of Balfour's firm. But she uttered no word, and made no sign.

Indeed there is a great courage and firmness in this gentle creature when the occasion demands. In the coolest possible manner she folded up the newspaper. Then she rose with a look of weariness.

“Oh, dear me,” said she, “I suppose I must go and get all these things out. I wish you would come and open my big box for me,” she adds, addressing her humble slave and attendant.

But all that affectation of calmness had gone by the time she had reached her own room.

“See!” she said, opening the paper with her trembling, small, white fingers. “See! Balfour is ruined—he has lost all his money—half a million of debts—oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? Must I tell her? Shall I tell her at once?”

Certainly the news was startling, but there was no need to cry over it.

“Oh, I know,” she said, with the tears starting to her eyes, “if I were to tell her now, she will start for England to-morrow morning. And I will go back with her,” she adds, wildly, “I will go back with her. You can go on to Colorado by yourself. Oh the poor child!—she will fly to him at once——” And still she stares through her wet eyes at this brief announcement as if it were some talisman to change the whole course of our lives.

"Come, come, come," is the patient remonstrance. "You have got to consider this thing quietly, or you may blunder into an awkward position and drag her with you."

"How, then?" she says. "It must be true surely."

"You are taking heaps of things for granted. If you consider that absence, and distance, and a good deal of covert lecturing have told on the girl's mind—if you think that she would now really be glad to go back to him, with the knowledge that people have got to put up with a good deal in married life, and with the intention of making the best of it—that is all very well. That is first-rate. You have effected a better cure than I expected——"

"Don't you see it yourself?" she says, eagerly. "Don't you see how proudly she talks of 'my husband' now? Don't you see that every moment she is thinking of England? *I know.*"

"Very well. Very good. But then, something depends on Balfour. You can't tell what his wishes or intentions may be. If he had

wanted her to know, he would have telegraphed to her, or caused her father to telegraph to her. On the other hand, if you take this piece of news to her, she will appeal to you. If she should wish to go back to England at once, you will have to consent. Then you cannot let her go back alone——”

“And I will not!” says this brave little woman, in a fury of unselfishness.

“Well—the fact is—as it appears to an unemotional person—there might be, you see, some little awkwardness, supposing Balfour was not quite prepared——”

“A man in trouble, and not prepared to receive the sympathy of his wife!” she exclaims.

“Oh, but you must not suppose that Balfour is living in a garret of dry crusts—the second act of an Adelphi drama, and that kind of thing. People who fail for half-a-million are generally pretty well off afterwards——”

“I believe Mr. Balfour will give up every penny he possesses to his creditors!” she says, vehemently; for her belief in the virtue of the

men of whom she makes friends is of the most uncompromising sort.

“No doubt it is a serious blow to an ambitious man like him; and then he has no profession to which he can turn to retrieve himself. But all that is beside the question. What you have got to consider is your guardianship of Lady Sylvia. Now if you were to sit down and write a fully explanatory letter to Mr. Balfour, telling him you had seen this announcement; giving your reasons for believing that Lady Sylvia would at once go to him if she knew; and asking him to telegraph a ‘yes’ or ‘no’: by that time, don’t you see, we should be getting towards the end of our journey and could ourselves take Lady Sylvia back. A week or two is not of much consequence. On the other hand, if you precipitate matters, and allow the girl to go rushing back at once, you may prevent the very reconciliation you desire. That is only a suggestion. It is none of my business. Do as you think best; but you should remember that the chances are a hundred to one that Lady Sylvia sees or hears

something of this telegram within the next day or two."

A curious happy light had stolen over this woman's face; and the soft dark eyes were as proud as if she were thinking of a fortune suddenly inherited instead of one irretrievably lost.

"I think," said she, slowly, "I think I could write a letter that would make Mr. Balfour a happy man, supposing he has lost every penny he has in the world."

Any one could see that the small head was full of busy ideas as she mechanically got out her writing-materials and placed them on the table. Then she sate down. It was a long letter; and the contents of it were never known to any human being except the writer of it and the person to whom it was sent. When she had finished it, she rose with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Perhaps," said she, with a reflective air, "perhaps I should have expressed some regret over this misfortune."

"No doubt you spoke of it as a very lucky thing!"

"I can't say," she admitted frankly, "that I am profoundly sorry."

Indeed she was not at all sorry ; and from that moment she began to take quite a new view of Chicago. There could be no doubt that this person of High Church proclivities, who liked to surrender her mind to all manner of mysteriously exalted moods, had from the very first regarded this huge dollar-getting hive with a certain gentle and unexpressed scorn. What was that she had been hinting about a person being able to carry about with him a sort of moral atmosphere to keep him free from outside influence ; and that the mere recollection of the verse of a song would sometimes suffice ? Lady Sylvia and she had been talking of some of Gounod's music. Were we to conclude, then, that as she wandered through this mighty city, with its tramways, and harbours, and telegraphs, and elevators, that she exorcised the demon of money-getting by humming to herself, "Ring on, sweet angelus !" As she passed through the Babel of price-quoters in the central hall of the hotel, it was no echo of

their talk that got into her brain, but quite a different echo :

*Hark ! 'tis the angelus, sweetly ringing
O'er hill and vale ;
Hark how the melody maidens are singing
Floats on the gale !*

* * * *

*Ring on, sweet angelus, though thou art shaking
My soul to tears !
Voices long silent now with thee are waking
From out the years,
From out the years !*

That may have been so ; but anyhow, on the morning after she had despatched her letter to Balfour, she entered into the business of sight-seeing with quite a new spirit. She declared that Chicago, for a great city, must be a delightful place to live in. Away from the neighbourhood of the manufactories the air was singularly pure and clear. Then there were continual cool winds coming in from the lake to temper the summer heat. Had anybody ever seen grass more green than that in the vast projected park on the southern side which would in time become one of the most noble parks in the world ? She considered that the park on the northern

side was beautifully laid out; and that the glimpses of Lake Michigan which one got through the trees were delightful. She greatly admired the combination of red sandstone and slightly yellowed marble which formed the fronts of the charming villas in those pretty gardens; and as for drives—well, she thought the chief part of the population of Chicago must live on wheels. It was so rare to find this august lady in so generous and enthusiastic a mood that we all began to admire Chicago; and quite envied our relative the ranch-woman in that she would be able to forsake her savage wilderness from time to time for this centre of the arts and civilization.

We revelled in all the luxuries of a great city, while as yet these were possible to us. We went to theatres, concerts, picture-exhibitions. We drove out to the park in the afternoon to hear the band play. We purchased nick-nacks for friends at home—just as if we had been a party of tourists.

“Come,” said our German ex-lieutenant, on the final day of our stay there, “this is our last

great town, is it not, before we go away to the swamps, and the prairies, and to the bowie-knives. Shall we not dress for dinner? And I propose that the dinner is at eight. And we will drink a glass of wine to the prosperity of this fine town."

The women would not hear of this proposal in its entirety; for as we had to start by train about eleven at night, they did not relish the notion of pulling out all their finery and putting it back again in a hurry. But we dined at eight all the same; and we did not fail to drink a glass of wine to the prosperity of that fine town. Long before midnight we were all fast asleep in snug berths, the train whirling us on through the darkness towards the country of the Mississippi.

CHAPTER VII.

A COLD RECEPTION.

WE rub our eyes. Have we wandered into a Brazilian swamp, then, during the long dark night? The yellow light of the early morning is shining down on those dusky pools of sluggish water, on the dense forest, on the matted underwood, and the rank green grass. How the railway track does not sink into this vast mere passes our comprehension; there seems scarcely sufficient mud on these scattered islands to support the partly submerged trees. But, as we are looking out, a new object suddenly confronts the eyes. Instead of that succession of still creeks we come on a broad expanse of coffee-coloured water that broadens out as it rolls southward; and we cry,—“The Mississippi!” And over there, on the other

side, we see a big and straggling town picturesquely built along the bluffs, and all shining in the early sunlight. But the Mississippi detains us not; nor Burlington either. Our mission is westward, and for ever westward—through the perpetual forest, with its recurrent clearances and farms and fields of maize. Surely it is a pleasant enough manner of passing this idle, beautiful day. The recent rains have laid the dust; we sit outside the car and lazily watch the rich colours of the underwood as we pass. Could anything be deeper in hue than the lake-red of those sumach bushes? Look at that maple—its own foliage is a mass of pale, transparent gold; but up the stem and out the branches runs a creeper, and the creeper is of a pure vermilion that burns in the sun. Westward—and for ever westward. We lose consciousness of time. We resign ourselves to the slow passing-by of the trees, and the farms, and the maize. It is like a continuous dream.

And was this, we asked ourselves—was this, after all, America? In the by-gone days, be-

fore we ever thought of putting foot on this vast continent, we had our imaginary pictures of it; and surely these were bigger and nobler things than this trivial recurrence of maize—maize—maize—an occasional house—endless trees and bushes, and bushes and trees? Who does not remember those famous words that thrilled two nations when they were spoken?—

“I have another and a far brighter vision before my gaze. It may be but a vision, but I will cherish it. I see one vast confederation stretching from the frozen North in unbroken line to the glowing South, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic to the calmer waters of the Pacific main,—and I see one people, and one language, and one law, and one faith, and, over all that wide continent, the home of freedom, and a refuge for the oppressed of every race and of every clime.” But where were the condor’s wings to give us this vision, now that we were about midway between the Atlantic and the Rocky Mountains? We only saw maize. And then we tried to imagine an American’s mental picture of England—something composed of Stratford-on-Avon, and Westminster Abbey, and

Rydal Mount, and Milton, and Shakespere, and Cromwell—and his bitter disappointment on sailing up the Mersey and coming into view of the squalor of Liverpool. This was the nonsense that got into our heads on this sleepy and sunny day.

But by-and-by the horizon widened, for we had been slowly ascending all this time ; and you may be sure there was a little excitement throughout our party when we began to get our first glimpses of the prairie-land. Not the open prairie just yet ; but still such suggestions of it as stirred the mind with a strange and mysterious feeling. And, of course, all our preconceived notions about the prairies were found to be wrong. They were not at all like the sea. They were not at all melancholy and oppressive. On the contrary, they were quite cheerful and bright in the sunshine ; though there was still that mysterious feeling about them ; and though the unaccustomed eye could not get quite reconciled to the absence from the horizon of some line of hill, and would keep searching for some streak of blue. Surely there

was nothing here of the dreary wastes we had imagined? First of all, and near us, was a rich wilderness of flowers, of the most bountiful verdure and variegated colours—masses of yellow sunflowers, and lilac Michaelmas-daisies and what not, with the blood-red of the sumach coming in. Further off, the plain rose and fell in gentle undulations covered with variously tinted grass; and here and there were the palisades of a few ranches. Further away still were wider and barer undulations, marked by one or two clusters of the minutest specks, which we took to be cattle. Then beyond that again the open prairie-land—long, level swathes, of the very faintest russet, and grey-green, and yellow-grey, going out—out—out until the blue sky of the horizon seemed quite close and near to us compared with that ever and mysteriously receding plain. This vast distance was not awful, like the sea. It was beautiful in its pale colours; it was full of an eager interest—for the eye appealed to the imagination to aid it in its endless search; and if it was an ocean at all it was an ocean that broke at our feet in a bril-

liant foam of flowers. This similitude was, indeed, so obvious that we unanimously were of opinion that it must have been used by every American poet who has ever written about the prairie-lands.

We had for our nearest travelling companions two commercial gentlemen of a facetious turn, who certainly did their best to amuse our women-folk. It was the lieutenant, of course, who had made their acquaintance. One was a Philadelphian, the other a New Yorker; but both were in the sewing-machine business; and it was their account of their various experiences in travelling that had induced Von Rosen to join their conversation. They were merry gentlemen. They ventured to ask what might be his line of business—white goods, or iron, or western produce?

“And if it is white goods, what then?” said the ex-soldier, with great sang-froid.

“Why, sir,” said the Philadelphian, gravely taking out a number of cards, “because money is money, and biz is biz; and you want to know where to buy cheap. That’s Philadelphia sure

—the American metropolis—the largest city in the world—yes, *sir* !—eighteen miles by eight—two rivers—going to have the Centennial—the best shad——”

He was regarding the New Yorker all this time.

“Yes—shad !” said his companion, with affected contempt ; for we could see that they were bent on being amiably funny. “If you want shad, go to Philadelphia—and cat-fish, too—cat-fish suppers at the Falls only seventy-five cents a head. And fresh butter, too—go to Philadelphia for fresh butter, and reed-birds, and country-board—best country-board outside of Jersey—keep their own cows—fresh milk, and all that. But if you WANT TO TRADE, Colonel, come to New York ! New York aint no village ; no one-horse place ; no pigs around our streets. We’ve got the finest harbour in the world ; the highest steeples ; the noblest park ; the greatest newspapers ; the most magnificent buildings—why, talk about your Coliseums, and Tuileries, and Whitechapel, and them one-horse shows ; come and see our Empire City !”

“Yes; and leave your purse in Philadelphia before you go!” sneered his enemy, who quite entered into the spirit of the thing. “And ask your friend here to show you the new Court House, and tell you how much *that* cost! Then let him drive you up the avenues, and have your life insured before you start, and show you the tar-and-sand, the mush-and-molasses pavements—patent pavements! Then ask him to introduce you to his friend the Boss, and mebbe he’ll tell you how much the Boss got away with. And then about the malaria? And the fever and ague? And the small-pox? And people dying off so fast they’ve got to run special trains for the corpses? And the Harlem Flats?”

“Now hire a hall, won’t you?” said the Knickerbocker. “Hasn’t our cat got a long tail! Why, you could roll up Philadelphia into a bundle and drop it into a hole in the Harlem Flats. But I wouldn’t mislead you—no, sir: if you want water-power go to Philadelphia—and grass—splendid grass—and mosquitoes. Tell him about the mosquitoes now!

Friend of mine in the sugar line married and went to Philadelphia for his honeymoon. Liked a quiet country life—no racket, except the roosters in the morning—liked the cows, and beauties of nature—and took his bride to a first-class hotel. Fine girl—bin chief engineer on a double-stitch sewing-machine. Well, sir, the Philadelphia mosquitoes were alive—you bet. In the morning he took her to a hospital—certain she had small-pox—two weeks before the doctors could find it out. The man's life was ruined—yes, sir: never recovered from the shock; business went to the dickens; and he ran away and jined the Mormons.”

“Jined the Mormons!” cried the Philadelphian. “Why don't you tell the General the story straight? Don't fool the man! Jined the Mormons! He threw her into a sugar vat—sweets to the sweet, sez he—and married her mother—and went to New York, and was elected Mayor as the friend of Ireland—eleven hundred thousand Irishmen, all yelling for the Pope, voted for him. No, General, if you want to trade with Americans, with white men,

you come to Philadelphia; we live cheap and we sell cheap; and with our new line of steamers, and our foreign trade——”

“Tell him about the canal boats—why don’t you tell him about the three canal boats?” said the other scornfully. “It is a fact, General—when three canal boats loaded with pop-corn and sauer-kraut got to Philadelphia, the Mayor called out the militia for a parade—yes, *sir*!—the town was illuminated—the newspapers had leaders on the revival of commerce, and the people all had two inches sewed on to their coat-tails. And mind, General, when you go to Philadelphia, you tell the conductor where to stop—tell him the wood-and-water station opposite Camden—the train stops by signal——”

Whither this conflict might have led us, can only be conjectured. It was interrupted by our halting at a small station to have a mid-day dinner. And we did not fail to remark that the shy and handsome girls who waited on the crowd of ravenous people in this humble hostelry had bright complexions and clear eyes,

that spoke well for the air of this high-lying country. The lieutenant was furious because he could get nothing but water or iced tea to drink; his wife remarked that she hoped he would always be as well off—showing that she had had her speculations about her probable life as a ranch-woman. But another member of the party was anxious to get away as soon as possible from the devouring multitude; and when she was outside again, on the platform, she revealed the cause of that pensiveness, that had at times dwelt over her face during the morning.

“Really now, *really*, do you think I was right?” she says, in a low voice. “I have been thinking over it. It seems so cruel. The poor thing is just breaking her heart over the mistake she has made—in ever leaving him; and now, when she would have this excuse, this opportunity of appealing to him—of going to him without any appeal—it seems dreadful to keep her in ignorance.”

“Tell her, then.”

“But the responsibility is terrible,” she pleads again.

"Certainly. And you absolve yourself by waiting to know what Balfour's wishes are. What more?"

"If—if I had a daughter—of her age," she says, with the usual quiver of the under-lip; "I do not think I should let her go further and further away from her husband just when there was a chance of reconciling them——"

"Will the chance be less next week, or the week after? However, do as you like. If you tell her, you must appeal to her not to do anything rash. Say you have written. Or you might suggest—if she is so very penitent—that she should write to her husband——"

"Oh, may I do that?" exclaims this tender-eyed hypocrite; as if she ever demanded permission to do anything she had set her mind on.

You never saw one woman so pet another as she petted Lady Sylvia during the rest of that day. She had never shown so much solicitous attention for the comfort of her own children, as far as any of us had ever noticed. And it was all because, no doubt, she was looking forward to a

sentimental scene when we should arrive at Omaha, in which she should play the part of a beneficent fairy, and wise counsellor, and earnest friend. Happily it did not occur to her to have a scene in the railway-car, before a score of people.

This railway-car, as the evening fell, was a sore distress to us. Our wish to have that fleeting glimpse of the Mississippi had led us to come on from Chicago by one of the slow trains; and from Burlington there was no Pullman car. Ordinarily this is about the pleasantest part of the long trans-continental ride from New York to San Francisco; for on it are dining-cars, which have within their narrow compass pretty nearly every luxury which the fancy of man could desire, and which therefore offer a capital way of passing the time. If one must go on travelling day after day without ceasing, it is surely a pleasant thing to occupy the last two or three hours of the evening by entertaining your friends to a banquet—and, if you are alone, the conductor will accept an off-hand invitation—of twelve or fourteen dishes, while

the foaming grape of eastern France, if Catawba will not content you, is hard by in an iced cellar. With these wild delights we should have been disposed to dispense, had we obtained the comparative seclusion of a Pullman car; but as the long and dull evening set in we learned something of the happiness of travelling in an ordinary car in America. During the day we had spent most of the time outside; now we had to bear with what composure we could show the stifling odours of this huge and overcrowded compartment, while the society to which we were introduced was not at all fastidious in its language, or in its dress, or in the food which it plentifully ate. The lieutenant said nothing when a drunk woman sat down on his top-coat and refused to allow it to be removed; but he did remonstrate pitifully against the persistent shower of beetles that kept falling on our heads and necks. We could not understand whence these animals came. Their home could not be the roof of the car; for they were clearly incapable of maintaining a footing there. Or were we driving through an Egyptian plague of

them ; and did they come in through the ventilators ? It was a miserable evening. The only escape from the foul odours, and the talk, and the shreds of food, was sleep ; and the close atmosphere gave its friendly help ; but sleep is apt to disarrange one's head-covering ; and then, that guard removed, the sudden sensation of having a beetle going down the back of one's neck banishes sweet dreams. About half-past eight or nine we got to Council Bluffs ; and right glad were we to get out for a walk up and down the wet platform—for it had been raining—in the pitch darkness.

Nor shall we forget Council Bluffs soon. We spent three mortal hours there. All that we saw was a series of planks, with puddles of dirty water reflecting the light of one or two gas-lamps. We were now on one bank of the Missouri ; and Omaha, our destination, was immediately on the other side ; while there intervened an iron bridge. An engine would have taken us across and returned in a very short time. But system must be followed. It was the custom, that the passengers by our train should

be taken over in company with those arriving by a train due from somewhere else; and as that train had not made its appearance, why should we not continue to pace up and down the muddy platform? It was not the least part of our anxiety that, after an hour or so had passed, ex-lieutenant Oswald von Rosen seemed disposed to eat six or seven railway porters, which would have involved us in a serious claim for damages.

He demanded whether we could not be allowed to walk across the bridge and on to Omaha. Certainly not. He wanted to have some clear understanding as to how late this other train was likely to be. Nobody knew.

“Du lieber Himmel!” we heard him muttering to himself, somewhere about eleven o’clock, “and in this confounded country the very sky is black with telegraph-lines, and they cannot tell you if we shall be here all the night! *Is it the beetles that have stopped the train?*” he suddenly demanded of a guard who was sitting on a hand-barrow and playfully swinging a lamp.

“I guess not,” was the calm answer.

"We might have been over the river and back half a dozen times—eh?"

"That's so," said the guard swinging the lamp.

It was near midnight when the other train arrived; and then the station resounded with the welcome cry of "All aboard!" But we flatly declined to re-enter one of those hideous compartments full of foul smells and squalor. We crowded together on the little iron balcony between the cars, clinging to the rails. And by-and-by we had a dim impression that we were in mid-air, over the waters of the Missouri, which we could not see. We could only make out the black bars of the iron bridge against the black sky, and that indistinctly. Still, we were glad to be moving; for by this time we were desperately hungry and tired; and the sumptuous hospitality of Omaha was just before us.

Alas! alas! the truth must be told. Omaha received us in the most cruel and hard-hearted fashion. First of all, we imagined we had blindly wandered into a kingdom of the bats.

There were some lights in the station, it is true ; but as soon as we had got into the hotel-omnibus and left these gloomy rays it appeared as though we had plunged into outer darkness. We did not know then that the municipal authorities of the place, recognizing the fact that business had not been brilliant, and that taxes lay heavily on themselves and their neighbours, had resolved to do without gas in order to save expense. All we knew was that this old omnibus went plunging frantically through absolute blackness ; and that in the most alarming manner. For what were these strange noises outside ? At one moment we would go jerking down into a hollow ; and the " swish " of water sounded as if we had plunged into a stream ; while we clung to each other to prevent our being flung from one end to the other of the vehicle. And then, two seconds afterwards, it really did appear to us that the horses were trying to climb up the side of a house. There was one small lamp that threw its feeble ray both outwards and inwards ; and we saw through a window a wild vision of a pair of spectral

horses apparently in mid-air; while inside the omnibus the lieutenant was down at the door, vainly trying to keep his wife from tumbling on the top of him.

"It is my firm conviction," said Queen T., panting with her struggles, "that we are not going along a road at all. We are going up the bed of the Missouri."

Then there were one or two more violent wrenches; and the vehicle stopped. We scrambled out. We turned an awe-stricken glance in the direction we had come; nothing was visible. It was with a great thankfulness that the shipwrecked mariners made their way into the hotel.

But was it hospitable, was it fair, was it Christian of the Grand Central of Omaha to receive us as it did after our manifold perils by land and water? Had we been saved from drowning only to perish of starvation? In the gloomy and echoing hall loud sounded the remonstrances of the irate lieutenant.

"What do you say?" he demanded of the highly indifferent clerk, who had just handed

us our keys. "Nothing to eat? nothing to drink? Nothing at all? And is this a hotel? Hé! It is nonsense what you say: why do you let your servants go away, and have everything shut up? It is the business of a hotel to be open. Where is your kitchen—your larder—what do you call it?"

In reply the clerk merely folded up his book of names, and screwed out one of the few remaining lights. Happily there were ladies present; or a deed of blood would have dyed that dismal hall.

At this moment we heard the click of billiards.

"Ha!" said the lieutenant.

He darted off in that direction. We had seen something of billiard-saloons in America. We knew there were generally bars there. We knew that, at the bars, there were frequently bread and cheese supplied gratis. Behold! the foraging soldier returns! His face is triumphant. In his hands, under his arms, are bottles of stout; his pockets are filled with biscuits; he has a paper-packet of cheese. Joy-

fully the procession moves to the floor above. With laughter and gladness the banquet is spread out before us ; let the world wag on as it may, there is still, now and again, some brief moment of happiness. And we forgave the waiting at Council Bluffs ; and we forgot the beetles ; and we drank to the health of Omaha !

But it was too bad of you, Omaha, to receive us like that, all the same.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN ENGLAND.

"I AM not frightened, but stunned—completely stunned," said Balfour; his hands on his knees, his head bent down. The ever-faithful Jewsbury had at once gone to him on hearing the news; and now the small man with the blue spectacles stood confronting him, all the joyousness gone out of his resonant voice. "I feel there must be a clean sweep. I will go down to The Lilacs, and send over one or two things belonging to—to my wife—to her father's; then everything must go. At present I feel that I have no right to spend a shilling on a telegram——"

"Oh," said Mr. Jewsbury, "when the Heavens rain mountains, you needn't be afraid of stones." What he exactly meant by this speech he him-

self probably scarcely knew. He was nervous; and very anxious to appear the reverse. "Nobody will expect you to do anything *outré*. You won't bring down the debts of the firm by giving up the postage-stamps in your pocket-book; and of course there will be an arrangement; and—and there are plenty of poor men in the House——"

"I have just sent a message down to Englebury," he said, showing but little concern. "I have resigned."

"But why this frantic haste?" remonstrated his friend, in a firmer voice. "What will you do next? Do you imagine you are the only man who has come tumbling down and has had to get up again—slowly enough, perhaps?"

"Oh, no! not at all," said Balfour, frankly. "I am in no despairing mood. I only want to get the decks clear for action. I have got to earn a living somehow—and I should only be hampered by a seat in Parliament——"

"Why, there are a hundred things you could do, and still retain your seat!" his friend cried. "Go to some of your friends in the late Gov-

ernment—get a private-secretaryship—write political articles for the papers—why, bless you, there are a hundred ways——”

“No, no, no,” Balfour said, with a laugh, “I don’t propose to become a bugbear to the people I used to know—a man to be avoided when you catch sight of him at the end of the street—a button-holer—a perpetual claimant. I am off from London, and from England, too. I dare say I shall find some old friend of my father’s ready to give me a start—in China or Australia—and as I have got to begin life anew it is lucky the blow fell before my hair was grey. Come, Jewsbury, will you be my partner? We will make our fortune together in a half-dozen years. Let us go for an expedition into the Bush. Or shall we have a try at Peru?—I was always certain that the treasures of the Incas could be discovered.”

“But, seriously, Balfour, do you mean to leave England?” the clergyman asked.

“Certainly.”

“Lady Sylvia——”

The brief glimpse of gaiety left his face instantly.

"Of course she will go to her father's when she returns from America," said he coldly.

"No, she will not," replied his friend, with some little warmth. "I take it from what you have told me of her that she is too true a woman for that. It is only now you will discover what a good wife can be to a man. Send for her. Take her advice. And see what she will say if you propose that she should abandon you in your trouble and go back to her father! See what she will say to that!"

Jewsbury spoke with some vehemence; and he did not notice that his companion had become strangely moved. It was not often that Balfour gave way to emotion.

"Why," said he—and then he suddenly rose and took a turn up and down the room, for he could not speak for a moment. "Jewsbury, she left me!—She left me!"

"She left you?" the other vaguely repeated; staring at the young man who stood there with clenched hands.

“Do you think,” Balfour continued, rapidly—with just a break here and there in his voice, “that I should be so completely broken down over the loss of that money? I never cared for money much. That would not hurt me, I think. But it is hard—when you are badly hit—to find——”

He made a desperate effort to regain his composure, and succeeded. He was too proud to complain. Nay, if the story had to be told now, he would take all the blame of the separation on himself, and try to show that his wife had fair grounds for declaring their married life unendurable. Mr. Jewsbury was a little bit bewildered; but he listened patiently.

“You have done wrong in telling me all that,” said he, at last. “I need never have known; for I see how this will end. But how fortunate you were to have that friend by you in such a crisis, with her happy expedient. No one but a married woman could have thought of it. If you had formally separated—if she had gone back to her father’s—that would have been for life.”

"How do you know this is not?"

"Because I believe every word of what that lady-friend of hers said to you. And—if I don't mistake," he added, slowly, "I don't think you will find this loss of money a great misfortune. I think if you were at this moment to appeal to her—to suggest a reconciliation—you would see with what gladness she would accept it."

"No," said the other, with some return to his ordinary reserve and pride of manner. "She left me, of her own free will. If she had come back, of her own free will, well and good. But I cannot ask her to come now. I don't choose to make an *ad misericordiam* appeal to any one. And if she found that my Parliamentary duties interfered with her notion of what our married life should be, what would she think of the much harder work I must attack somewhere or other if I am to earn a living? She would not accompany me from Surrey to Piccadilly: do you think she would go to Shanghai or Melbourne?"

"Yes," said his friend.

"I, at least, will not ask her," he said. "Indeed I should be quite content if I knew that her father could provide her with a quiet and comfortable home; but I fear he won't be able to hold on much longer to the Hall. She was happy there," he added, with his eyes grown thoughtful. "She should never have left it. The interest she tried to take in public affairs—in anything outside her own park—was only a dream—a fancy; she got to hate everything connected with the actual business of the world almost directly after she was married——"

"Why?" cried his friend, who had as much shrewdness as most people. "The cause is clear—simple—obvious. Public life was taking away her husband from her a trifle too much. And if that husband is rather a reserved person—and rather inclined to let people take their own way, instead of humouring them and reasoning with them——"

"Well, now, I think you are right there," said Balfour, with some eagerness. "I should have tried harder to persuade her. I should

have had more consideration. I should not have believed in her refusals—— But there,” he added, rising, “it is all over now. Will you go out for a stroll, Jewsbury? I shan’t bore you with another such story when you take a run out to see me at Melbourne.”

Now it happened that when they got out into Piccadilly the Kew omnibus was going by; and the same project struck both friends at the one moment—for the wilder part of the Gardens had at one time been a favourite haunt of theirs. A second or two afterwards they were both on the top of the omnibus; driving through the still, warm air; greatly contented; and not at all afraid of being seen in that conspicuous position. The brisk motion introduced some cheerfulness into their talk.

“After all, Balfour,” said Mr. Jewsbury, with philosophic resignation, “there are compensations in life; and you may probably live more happily outside politics altogether. There was always the chance—I may say so now—of your becoming somebody; and then you would have gone on to commit the one unforgivable sin—

the sin that the English people never condone. You might have done signal service to your country. You might have given up your days and nights—you might have ruined your health—you might have sacrificed all your personal interests and feelings—in working for the good of your fellow-countrymen; and then you know what your reward would have been. That is the one thing the English people cannot forgive. You would have been jeered at and ridiculed in the Clubs; abused in the papers; taunted in Parliament; treated everywhere as if you were at once a self-seeking adventurer, a lunatic, and a fiend bent on the destruction of the State. If you had spent all your fortune on yourself; given up all your time to your own pleasures; paid not the slightest attention to anybody around you except in so far as they ministered to your comfort, then you would have been regarded as an exemplary person, a good man, and honest Englishman. But if you had given up your whole life to trying to benefit other people through wise legislation, then your reward would be the pillory, for

every coward and sneak to have his fling at you."

"My dear Jewsbury," Balfour said, with a rueful smile, "it is very kind of you to insist that the grapes are sour."

"Another advantage is that you will have added a new experience to your life," continued the philosopher who was bent on cheering his friend up a bit, "and will be in so much the completer man. The complete man is he who has gone through all human experiences. Time and the law are against any single person doing it; but you can always be travelling in that direction."

"One ought, for example, to pick a pocket and get sent to prison?"

"Certainly."

"And run away with one's neighbour's wife?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And commit a murder?"

"No," replied this clerical person, "for that might disturb the experiment—might bring it to an end, in fact. But there can be no doubt

that Shakspeare committed several diabolical murders, and was guilty of the basest ingratitude, and was devoured with the most fiendish hatred—in imagination. In turns he was a monster of cupidity, of revenge, of bloodthirstiness, of cowardice. Other men, who have not the power to project themselves in this fashion, can only learn through action. It therefore follows that the sooner you get yourself sent to the treadmill the better.”

“And indeed I suppose I am nearer it now than I was a week ago,” Balfour admitted. “And perhaps I shall soon begin to envy and imitate my esteemed father-in-law in the little tricks by which he earns a few sovereigns now and again. I used to be very severe on the old gentleman; but I may have to take to sham companies myself.”

With this and similar discourse the two sages passed the time until they arrived at Kew. It will be observed that as yet it was only a theoretical sort of poverty that had befallen Balfour. It was a sort of poverty that did not prevent the two friends from having a fairly

comfortable luncheon at a hotel down there; or from giving up the day to idle sauntering through the wilder and uncultivated portion of the Gardens; or from indulging in useless guesses as to what might have been, had Balfour been able to remain in Parliament.

“But in any case you will come back,” continued Mr. Jewsbury, who was trying to espy a squirrel he had seen run up the trunk of an elm, “and you will be burdened with wealth, and rich in knowledge. Then, when you get into Parliament, shall I tell you what you must do? Shall I give you a project that will make your name famous in the political history of your country?”

“It won’t be of much use to me,” was the answer; “but I know one or two gentlemen down at Westminster who would be glad to hear of it.”

“Take my proposal with you now. Brood over it. Collect facts wherever you go. Depend on it——”

“But what is it?”

“The total abolition of that most pernicious superstition—trial by jury. Why, man, I could give you the heads of a speech that would ring through the land. The incorruptibility of the English bench—the vast learning, the patience, the knowledge of the world, the probity of our judges. Then you draw a picture of one of these judges laboriously setting out the facts of a case before the jury; and of his astonishment at their returning a verdict directly in the teeth of the evidence. Think of the store of anecdotes you could amass—to get the House into a good humour. Then a burst of pathetic indignation. Whose reputation, whose fortune is safe, if either depends on the verdict of twelve crass idiots? A bit of flash oratory on the part of a paid pleader may cost a man a couple of thousand pounds in the face of common sense and justice. Balfour,” said Mr. Jewsbury, solemnly, “the day on which the verdict in the Tichborne case was announced was a sad day for me.”

“Indeed,” said the other. “I have got an uncle-in-law who believes in Tich yet. I will

give you a note of introduction to him; and you might mingle your tears."

"I was not thinking of Tich," continued Mr. Jewsbury, carefully plaiting some long grass together, "I was thinking of this great political project which I am willing to put into your hands—it will keep a few years. And I was thinking what a great opportunity was lost when those twelve men brought in a verdict that Arthur Orton was Arthur Orton. I had almost counted on their bringing in a verdict that Arthur Orton was Roger Tichborne; but if that was too much to hope for, then at least I took it for granted that they would disagree. That single fact would have been of more use to you than a hundred arguments. Armed with it, you might have gone forward single-handed to hew down this monstrous institution——" and here Mr. Jewsbury aimed a blow at a mighty chestnut-tree with the cord of grass he had plaited. The chestnut-tree did not tremble.

"However, I see you are not interested," the small clergyman continued. "That is

another fact you will learn. A man without money pays little heed to the English Constitution, unless he hopes to make something out of it. What is the immediate thing you mean to do ? ”

“ I can do nothing at present,” Balfour said absently. “ The lawyers will be let loose, of course. Then I have written to my wife, requesting her—at least making the suggestion that she should give up the money paid to her under the marriage-settlement——”

“ Stop a bit,” said Mr. Jewsbury. “ I won’t say that you have been Quixotic ; but don’t you think that, before taking such a step, you ought to have got to know what the—the custom is in such things—what commercial people do—what the creditors themselves would expect you to do ? ”

“ I cannot take any one’s opinion on the point,” Balfour said, simply. “ But of course, I only made the suggestion in informing her of the facts. She will do what she herself considers right.”


“ I cannot understand your talking about

your wife in that tone," said Jewsbury, looking at the impassive face.

"I think they mean to transfer—to the Lords," said Balfour, abruptly; and so for a time they talked of Parliamentary matters, just as if nothing had happened since Balfour left Oxford. But Jewsbury could see that his companion was thinking neither of Lords nor of Commons.

And indeed it was he himself, despite all his resolve, who wandered back to the subject; and he told Jewsbury the whole story over again, more amply and sympathetically than before; and he could not give sufficient expression to the gratitude he bore towards that kind and gracious and generous friend down there in Surrey who had lent him such swift counsel and succour in his great distress.

"And what do you think of it all, Jewsbury?" said he, with all the proud reserve gone from his manner and speech. "What will she do? It was only a sort of probationary tour, you know—she admitted that—there was no definite separation——"



Mr. Jewsbury gave no direct answer.

"Much depends," he said, slowly, "on the sort of letter you wrote to her. From what you say I should imagine it was very injudicious, a little bit cruel, and likely to make mischief."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISCLOSURE.

"LADY SYLVIA," said Queen T., going up to her friend, whom she found seated alone in her room in this Omaha hotel, "I am going to surprise you."

"Indeed," said the other, with a pleasant smile; for she did not notice the slightly trembling hands, and most of Queen T.'s surprises for her friends were merely presents.

"I—hope I shall not frighten you," she continued, with some hesitation; "you must prepare yourself for—for rather bad news——"

She caught sight of the newspaper. She sprang to her feet.

"My husband!" she cried, with a suddenly white face. But her friend caught her hands.

"He is quite well—don't be alarmed—it is only a—a—misfortune."

And therewith she put the paper into her hand, with an indication as to where she should look; while she herself turned aside somewhat. There was silence for a second or two. Then she fancied she heard a low murmur—a moan of infinite tenderness, and pity, and longing—"My husband! My husband!" and then there was a slight touch on her arm. When she turned, Lady Sylvia was standing quite calmly there, with her eyes cast down. Her face was a little pale, that was all.

"I think I will go back to England now," said she, gently.

And with that, of course, her friend began to cry a bit; and it was with a great deal of difficulty and of resolute will that she proceeded to speak at all. And then she bravely declared that, if Lady Sylvia insisted on setting out at once, she would accompany her; and it needed equal bravery to admit what she had done—that she had written to Mr. Balfour, begging him to let us know what his plans

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were, and that she had told him where he might telegraph——

“The telegraph!” cried Lady Sylvia with a quick light of joy leaping to her eyes. “I can send him a message now! He will have it this very day! I will go at once!”

“Yes, there is the telegraph,” stammered her friend, “and there is an office below in the hall of the hotel. But—don’t you think—it might be awkward—sending a message that the clerks will read——”

Lady Sylvia seized her friend’s hands, and kissed her on both cheeks, and hurried out of the room and down-stairs. The elder woman was rather taken back. Why should she be so warmly thanked for the existence of the telegraph, and for the fact that Mr. Balfour, M.P., was ruined?

Lady Sylvia went down-stairs; and in the hall she found the telegraphic office. She was not afraid of any clerk of woman born. She got a pencil, and the proper form; and clearly and firmly, after she had put in the address, she wrote beneath—“*My darling husband, May I*

come to you?" She handed the paper to the clerk, and calmly waited until he had read it through, and told her what to pay. Then she gave him the necessary dollars; and turned and walked through the hall, and came up the stairs, proud and erect—as proud, indeed, as if she had just won the battle of Waterloo.

And she was quite frank and fearless in speaking about this failure; and treated it as if it were an ordinary and trivial matter that could be put right in a few minutes. Her husband—she informed Mr. Von Rosen, who was greatly distressed by the news, and was consoling with her very sincerely—was quite capable of holding his own in the world without any help from his father's business. No doubt it would alter their plans of living; but Mr. Balfour was not at all the sort of man likely to let circumstances overpower him. And would it please us to set out at once on our inspection of Omaha; for she would like to get a glimpse of the Missouri; and there was the possibility that she might have to start off for England that night.

“*Nee!*” cried the Lieutenant, in indignant protest. “It is impossible! Now that you have only the few days more to go on—and then your friends to go back——”

Here one of the party intimated her wish—or rather, her fixed intention—of accompanying Lady Sylvia.

“Oh no!” our guest said, with quite a cheerful smile. “I am not at all afraid of travelling alone—not in the least. I have seen a great deal of how people have to help themselves, since I left England. And that is not much hardship. I believe one can go right through from here to New York; and then I can go to the Brevoort House, which seemed the quietest of the hotels, and wait for the first steamer leaving for Liverpool. I am not in the least afraid.”

Our Bell looked at her husband. That look was enough; he knew his fate was sealed. If Lady Sylvia should set out that evening, he knew he would have to accompany her as far as New York anyhow.

I think she quite charmed the hearts of the

kind friends who had come to show us about the place. The truth was that the recent heavy rains had changed Omaha into a Slough of Despond ; and the huge holes of mud in the unmade streets were bridged over by planks of wood that were of the most uncertain character ; but she seemed rather to like this way of laying out streets. Then we climbed up to the heights above the town on which is built the High School—a handsome building of red brick ; and she betrayed the greatest interest in the system of education followed here, and listened to the catechising of the children by the smartly dressed and self-composed young ladies who were their teachers, just as if she understood all about co-sines and angles of reflection. And when we clambered up to the tower of this building, she was quite delighted with the spacious panorama spread out all around. Far over there was a mighty valley—a broad plain between two long lines of bluffs—which was no doubt in former times worn down by the Missouri ; and now this plain, we could see, was scored along by various channels,

one of them, a little darker in hue than the neighbouring sand, being the yellow Missouri itself. We were rather disappointed with the mighty Missouri, which we expected to find rolling down in grandeur to the sea—or rather, to the Mississippi, if the poet will allow us to make the correction. We considered that even the name they give it out here, the Big Muddy, was misapplied; for it did not seem broader than the Thames at Richmond, while the mud-banks and sand-banks on both sides of it were of the dreariest sort. But she would not hear a word said against the noble river. No doubt at other times of the year it had sufficient volume; and even now was there not something mysterious in this almost indistinguishable river rolling down through that vast, lonely, and apparently uninhabited plain? As for Omaha, it looked as bright as blue skies and sunshine could make it. All around us were the wooden shanties, and the occasional houses of stone, dotted about in a promiscuous fashion—out there on the green undulations where the prairie began; on the

sides of the bluffs where the trees were; and along the level mud-bed of the river, where the railway-works and smelting-works were sending up a cloud of smoke into the still clear air. We visited these works. She listened with great interest to the explanations of the courteous officials; and struck up a warm friendship with a civil engineer at the railway-works, doubtless because he spoke with a Scotch accent. But, after all, we could see she was becoming anxious and nervous; and rather before mid-day we proposed to return to the hotel for luncheon.

Four hours had elapsed.

"But you must not make sure of finding an answer awaiting you, my dear Lady Sylvia," said her ever thoughtful friend. "There may be delays. And Mr. Balfour may be out of town."

All the same she did make sure of an answer; and when, on arriving at the hotel, she was informed that no telegram had come for her, she suddenly went away to her own room, and we did not see her for some little time. When

she did make her appearance at lunch, we did not look at her eyes.

She would not go out with us for our further explorations. She had a headache. She would lie down. And so she went away to her own room.

But the curious thing was that Queen T. would not accompany us either. It was only afterwards that we learned that she had kept fluttering about the hall, bothering the patient clerks with inquiries as to the time that a telegram took to reach London. At last it came, and it was given to her. We may suppose that she carried it upstairs quickly enough—and with a beating heart. What happened in the room she only revealed subsequently, bit by bit, for her voice was never quite steady about it.

She went into the room gently. Lady Sylvia was seated at a table, her hands on the table, her head resting on them ; and she was sobbing bitterly. She was deserted, insulted, forsaken. He would not even acknowledge the appeal she had made to him. But she started up when

she heard some one behind her ; and would have pretended to conceal her tears—but that she saw the telegram. With trembling fingers she opened it—threw a hasty glance at it—and then with a strange, proud look, gave it back to her friend, who was so anxious and excited that she could scarcely read the words—“ *No. I am coming to you.*” And at the same moment all Lady Sylvia’s fortitude broke down, and she gave way to a passion of hysterical joy—throwing her arms round her friend’s neck, and crying over her, and murmuring close to her, “Oh, my angel—my angel—my angel—you have saved to me all that was worth living for !” So much can imaginative people make out of a brief telegram.

The two women seemed quite mad when we returned.

“He is coming out ! Mr. Balfour is coming to join us !” says Queen T., with a wild fire of exultation in her face, as if the Millennium were at hand ; and Lady Sylvia was sitting there, proud enough, too, but rosy-red in the face, and with averted eyes.

And here occurred a thing which has always been a memorable puzzle to us.

“Ha!” cried the lieutenant in the midst of an excitement which the women in vain endeavoured to conceal, “that rifle! Does he remember that wonderful small rifle of his? It will be of such use to him in the Rocky Mountains. I think—yes, I think—it is worth a telegram.”

And he went down-stairs to squander his money in that fashion. But, we asked ourselves afterwards, did he know? Had he and his wife suspected? Had they discussed the affairs of Lady Sylvia and her husband in those quiet conjugal talks of which the outsider can never guess the purport? And had this young man, with all his bluntness and good-natured common-sense, and happy matter-of-fact-ness, suddenly seized the dramatic situation, and called aloud about this twopenny-halfpenny business of a pea-shooter all to convince Lady Sylvia of the general ignorance and put her at her ease? He came up a few moments afterwards, whistling.

"There is antelope," said he, seriously, "and the mountain-sheep, and the black-tailed deer, and the bear. Oh, he will have much amusement with us when he comes to Idaho."

"You forget," says Lady Sylvia, smiling, though her eyes were quite wet, "that he will be thinking of other things. He has got to find out how he has got to live first."

"How he has got to live?" said the lieutenant, with a shrug of his shoulders. "That is simple. That is easy. Any man can settle that. He has got to live—happy, and let things take their chance. What harm in a holiday, if he comes with me to shoot one or two bears?"

"Indeed you will do nothing of the kind," said his wife, severely: she had too much regard for her babes to let the father of them go off endangering his life in that fashion.

That was a pleasant evening. Our friends came to dine with us; and we settled all our plans for our expedition to the Indian Reservations lying far up the Missouri valley. And

who was first down in the morning ; and who was most delighted with the clear coolness of the air and the blue skies ; and who was most cheerful and philosophical when we discovered, at the station, and when it was too late, that the carpet-bag we had stuffed with wine, beer, and brandy, for our stay in these temperate climes had been left behind at the hotel ?

The small branch line of railway took us only about forty miles on our way. We went up the immensely broad valley of the river which was at this time only a rivulet. The valley was a plain of rich vegetation—long water-colour washes of yellow, and russet, and olive-green. The further side of it was bounded by a distant line of bluffs, bright blue in colour. Close by us were the corresponding bluffs, broken with ravines which were filled with cotton-trees, and which opened out into a thick underwood of sun-flowers ten feet high and of deep-hued sumach. Overhead a pale blue sky, and some white clouds. Then, as we are looking up into the light, we see an immense flock of wild geese making up the stream, divided into two lines

representing the letter V placed horizontally, but more resembling a handful of dust flung high into the air.

About mid-day we reached the terminus of the line, Tekamah, a collection of wooden shanties and houses with a few cotton-trees about. We had luncheon in a curious little inn which had originally been a block-house against the Indians—that is to say, it had been composed of sawn trees driven into the earth, with no windows on the ground floor. By the time we had finished luncheon our two carriages were ready—high-sprunged vehicles with an awning, and each with a moderately good pair of horses. We set out for our halting-place, Decatur, sixteen miles off.

That drive up the bed of the Missouri we shall not soon forget. There was no made road at all, but only a worn track through the dense vegetation of this swampy plain, while ever and anon this track was barred across by ravines of rich, deep, black, succulent mud. It was no unusual thing for us to see first one horse and then its companion almost disappear into a hole,

we looking down on them ; then there would be a fierce struggle, a plunge on our part, and then we were looking up at the horses pawing the bank above us. How the springs held out we could not understand. But occasionally, to avoid these ruts, we made long detours through the adjacent prairie-land lying over the bluffs ; and certainly this was much pleasanter. We went through a wilderness of flowers ; and the scent of the trampled May-weed filled all the air around us. How English horses would have behaved in this wilderness was a problem. The sun-flowers were higher than our animals' heads ; they could not possibly see where they were going ; but all the same they slowly ploughed their way through the forest of crackling stems. But before we reached Decatur we had to return to the mud-swamp, which was here worse than ever ; for now it appeared as if there were a series of rivers running at right angles to the broad black track, and our two vehicles kept plunging through the water and mud as if we were momentarily to be sucked down into a morass. The air was

thick with insect-life ; and vast clouds of reed-birds rose, as we passed, from the sun-flowers. There was a red fire all over the west as we finally drove into the valley of the Decatur.

It was a strange-looking place. The first objects that met our eyes were some Indian boys riding away home to the Reservations on their ponies, and looking picturesque enough with their ragged and scarlet pantaloons, their open-breasted shirt, their swarthy face and shining black hair, and their arms swinging with the galloping of the ponies, though they stuck to the saddle like a leech. And these were strange-looking gentlemen, too, whom we met in the inn of Decatur—tall, swanking fellows, with big riding-boots and loose jackets, broad-shouldered, spare-built, unwashed, unshaven, but civil enough though they set their broad-brimmed hats with a devil-may-care air on the side of their head. We had dinner with these gentlemen in the parlour of the inn. There were two dishes—from which each helped himself with his fingers—of some sort of dried

flesh which the lieutenant declared to be pelican of the wilderness ; and there were prunes and tea. We feared our friends were shy, for they did not speak at all before our women-folk. In a few minutes they disposed of their meal, and went out to a bench in front of the house to smoke. Then the lieutenant—so as not to shock these temperate people—produced one of several bottles of Catawba which he had procured at some wayside station before we left the railway. In appearance, when poured out, it was rather like tea, though not at all so clear ; and, in fact, the taste was so unlike anything we had ever met before that we unanimously pronounced in favour of the tea. But the lieutenant would try another bottle ; and that being a trifle more palatable, we had much pleasure in drinking a toast. And the toast we drank was the safety of the gallant ship that was soon to carry Lady Sylvia's husband across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER X.

FIRE-CHIEF.

NEXT morning, as we drove away from Decatur, a cold white fog lay all along the broad valley of the Missouri; but by-and-by the sun drank it up, and the warm light seemed to wake into activity all the abounding animal life of that broken and wooded country that skirts the prairie. There were clouds of reed-birds rising from the swamps as we approached; now and again a mourning-dove quietly flew across; large hawks hovered high in air; and so abundant were the young quail that it seemed as if our horses were continually about to trample down a brood coolly crossing the road. We saw the gopher running into his hole; and the merry little chipmunk eyeing us as we passed; and at

one point we gave a badger a bit of a chase, the animal quietly trotting down the road in front of us. The air was cool and pleasant. Dragon-flies flashed, and butterflies fluttered across in the sunlight; it was a beautiful morning.

And at last we were told that we were on the Reservation-lands, though nothing was visible but the broken bluffs, and the open prairie beyond, and on our right the immense valley of the Missouri. But in time we came to a farm, and drove up to a very well-built house, and here we made the acquaintance of H—— F——, who most courteously offered to act as our guide for the day. He took a seat in our vehicle; and though he was rather shy and silent at first, this constraint soon wore off. And Lady Sylvia regarded our new acquaintance with a great friendliness and interest; for had she not heard the heroic story of his brother, the last chief of the Omahas, "Logan of the Fires"?—how, when his tribe was being pursued by the savage Sioux, and when there seemed to be no escape from extermination, he himself, as night fell, went

off and kindled fire after fire so as to lead the enemy after him, and how he had the proud satisfaction of knowing, when he was taken and killed, that he had saved the life of every man, woman, and child of his followers. We did not wonder that the brother of the hero was regarded with much respect by the Omahas—in fact, there was a talk, at the time of our visit, of the smaller chiefs, or heads of families, electing him chief of the tribe. Indeed, the story reflected some romantic lustre on the peaceful Omahas themselves; and we began to cherish a proper contempt for their neighbours, the Winnibagoes—the broken remnant of the tribe which committed the horrible massacres in Minnesota some years ago, and which, after having been terribly punished and disarmed, was transferred by the Government to the prairie-land adjoining the Missouri.

But for the time being we kept driving on and on, without seeing Winnibago, or Omaha, or any sign of human life or occupation. Nothing but the vast and endless billows of the prairie—a beautiful yellow-green in the sun—reced-

ing into the faint blue-white of the horizon ; while all around us was a mass of flowers—the Michaelmas-daisy being especially abundant ; while the air was everywhere scented with the aromatic fragrance of the May-weed. We had now quite lost sight of the Missouri Valley, and were pursuing a path over this open prairie which seemed to lead to no place in particular. But while this endless plain seemed quite unbroken, bare, and destitute of trees, it was not really so. It was intersected by deep and sharp gullies, the beds of small tributaries of the Missouri, and the sides of these gullies were lined with dense brushwood and trees. It was certainly a country likely to charm the heart of a tribe of Indians—if only they were allowed to have weapons and to return to their former habits ; for it offered every facility for concealment and ambuscade. But all that is a thing of the past, so far as the Missouri Indians are concerned ; their young men have not even the chance—taken by the young men of apparently peaceable tribes living on other Reservations—of stealing quietly away to the Sioux ; for the

Sioux and the Omahas have ever been deadly enemies.

The danger we encountered in descending into these gullies was not that of being surprised and having our hair removed, but of the vehicle to which we clung toppling over and going headlong to the bottom. These breakneck approaches to the rude wooden bridges—where there were bridges at all—were the occasion of much excitement; and our friendly guide, who seemed to treat the fact of the vehicle hovering in air, as if uncertain which way to fall, with much indifference, must have arrived at the opinion that Englishwomen were much given to screaming when their heads were bumped together. In fact, at one point they refused to descend in the carriage. They got out and scrambled down on foot; and the driver, with that rare smile one sees on the face of a man who has been hardened into gravity by the life of an early settler, admitted that, if the vehicle had been full, it would most assuredly have pitched over.

At length we descried, on the green slope of

one of the far undulations, three teepees—tall, narrow, conical tents, with the tips of the poles on which the canvas is stretched appearing at the top, and forming a funnel for the smoke—and near them a herd of ponies. But there were no human beings visible ; and our path did not approach these distant tents. The first of the Indians we encountered gave us rather a favourable impression of the physique of the Omahas. He was a stalwart young fellow ; his long black hair plaited ; a blue blanket thrown round his square shoulders. He stood aside to let the vehicle pass, and eyed us somewhat askance ; the few words that F—— addressed to him, and which he answered, were of course unintelligible to us. Then we overtook three or four more, men and women, in various attire ; but altogether they were better in appearance and more independent in manner than the Gypsy-looking Indians we had seen skulking around the confines of the towns, in more or less “civilized” dress, and not without a side-glance for unconsidered trifles. These, we were told, were mostly Pawnees ; though the Winni-

bagoes have in some measure taken to the neighbourhood of the towns on the chance of getting a stray dollar by digging. After we passed these few stragglers, we were apparently once more on the tenantless prairies; but doubtless the Indians, who prefer to live in their teepees out on the plain rather than accept the semi-civilization of the Agency, had taken to the hollows, so that the country around us was not quite the desert that it seemed to be.

But a great honour was in store for us. When it was proposed that we should turn aside from our path and visit the wigwam of Fire Chief, one of the heads of the small communities into which the tribe is divided, some scruples were expressed; for we held that no human being, whether he was a Poet-Laureate or a poor Indian, liked to have his privacy invaded from motives of mere curiosity. Then we had no presents to offer him as an excuse.

"No tobacco?" said our good-natured guide, with a smile. "An Indian never refuses tobacco."

The news of our approach to the wigwam

was doubtless conveyed ahead ; for we saw some dusky children scurry away and disappear like rabbits. The building was a large one ; the base of it being a circular and substantial wall of mud and turf apparently about ten feet high ; the conical roof sloping up from the wall being chiefly composed of the trunks of trees, leaving a hole at the summit for the escape of smoke. We descended from our vehicles ; and crouching down, pushed aside the buffalo skin that served for door, and entered the single and spacious apartment which contained Fire Chief, his wives, children, and relatives. For a second or two we could scarcely see anything, so blinding was the smoke ; but presently we made out that all round the circular wigwam, which was probably between thirty and forty feet in diameter, were a series of beds, towards which the squaws and children had retreated, while in the middle of the place, seated on a buffalo skin in front of the fire, was the Chief himself. He took no notice of our entrance. He stared into the fire as we seated ourselves on a bench ; but one or two of the younger women, from

out the dusky recesses, gazed with obvious wonder on these strange people from a distant land. Fire Chief is a large and powerful-looking man, with a sad and worn face ; obviously a person of importance, for he wore an armlet of silver and ear-rings of the same material, and his moccasins of buffalo-hide were very elaborately embroidered with beads and porcupine quills ; while the dignity of his demeanour was quite appalling.

“ Will you take a cigar, sir ? ” said the lieutenant, who had vainly endeavoured to get one of the children to come near him.

Fire Chief did not answer. He only stared into the smouldering wood before him. But when the cigar was presented to him, he took it, and lit it with a bit of burning stick, resuming his air of absolute indifference.

“ Does he not speak English ? ” said Lady Sylvia, in an undertone to our guide, who had been conversing with him in his own tongue.

“ They don’t know much English,” said F——, with a smile, “ and what they do know they don’t care to speak. But he asks me to

tell you that one of the young men is sick. That is he in the bed over there. And he says he has not been very well himself lately."

"Will you tell him," said Lady Sylvia, gently, "that we have come about five thousand miles from our homes, and that we are greatly pleased to see him, and that we hope he and the young man will very soon be well again?"

When this message was conveyed to the chief, we rose and took our departure; and he took no more notice of our leaving than our coming. Shall we say that we felt, on getting outside, rather "mean;" that the fact of our being a pack of inquisitive tourists was rather painful to us; that we mentally swore we should not "interview" another human being, Indian or Poet-Laureate, during the whole course of our miserable lives? Our self-consciousness in this respect was not at all shared by our good friend from Omaha who was driving one of the two vehicles, and who seemed to regard the Indian as a very peculiar sort of animal, decidedly less than human, but with

his good points all the same. Was it not he who told us that story about his wife having been one day alone in her house—many years ago, when the early settlers found the Indians more dangerous neighbours than they are now—and engaged in baking, when two or three Indians came to the door and asked for bread? She offered them an old loaf; they would not have it; they insisted on having some of the newly-baked bread; and they entered the house to seize it; whereupon this courageous house-mistress took up her rolling-pin and laid about her, driving her enemy forthwith out of the door. But the sequel of the story has to be told. Those very Indians, whenever they came that way, never passed the house without bringing her a present—a bit of venison, some quail, or what not—and the message they presented with the game was always this—“ Brave squaw ! Brave squaw ! ” which shows that there is virtue in a rolling-pin; and that heroism, and the recognition of it, did not die out with the abandonment of chain- armour.

We also heard a story which suggests that the

Indian, if an inferior sort of animal, is distinctly a reasoning one. Some years ago a missionary arrived in these parts, and was greatly shocked to find, on the first Sunday of his stay, that these Indians who had taken to agriculture were busily planting maize. He went out and conjured them to cease; assuring them that the God whom he worshipped had commanded people to do no work on the Sabbath; and that nothing would come of their toil if they committed this sin. The Indians listened gravely; and, having staked off the piece of ground they had already planted, desisted from work. After that they never worked on Sunday except within this enclosure; but then this enclosure got the extra day's hoeing and tending. When harvest came, behold! the space that had been planted and tended on Sunday produced a far finer crop than any adjacent part; and no doubt the Indians came to their own conclusions about the predictions of the missionary. Anyhow, whether the legend be true or not, the Omahas retain their original faith.

At length we reached the Agency—a small collection of houses scattered about among trees—and here there were some greater signs of life. Small groups of Indians, picturesque enough with their coloured blankets and their leggings of buffalo-hide, stood lounging about, pretending not to see the strangers, but taking furtive glances all the same; while now and again a still more picturesque figure in scarlet pants and with swinging arms would ride by on his pony, no doubt bound for his teepee out on the plain. Alas! the only welcome we received from any of the Indians was accorded us by a tall and bony idiot, who greeted us with a friendly “How?” and a grin. We had our horses taken out; we were hospitably entertained by the Agent, a sober and sedate Quaker; and then we went out for a stroll round the place, which included an inspection of the store, the blacksmith’s shop, and other means for assisting the Indians to settle down to a peaceful agricultural life.

Our party unanimously came to the opinion—having conversed to the extent of “How?”

with one Indian, and that Indian an idiot—that the preference of the Indians for remaining paupers on the hands of the Government rather than take to tilling the ground is natural. The Indian, by tradition and instinct, is a gentleman. Of all the races of the world he is the nearest approach one can get to the good old English squire. He loves horses; he gives up his life to hunting and shooting and fishing; he hasn't a notion in his head about "boetry and bainting;" and he considers himself the most important person on the face of the earth. But the Indian is the more astute of the two. Long ago he evolved the ingenious theory that as his success in the chase depended on his nerves being in perfect order, it would never do for him to attack the ordinary rough work of existence; and hence he turned over to his wife or wives, the tending of the horses, the building of the teepees, the procuring of fuel—in fact, all the work that needed any exertion. This is one point on which the English country gentleman is at a disadvantage; although we have heard of one sensible man who invariably

let his wife fill and screw up his cartridges for him.

And you expect this native gentleman to throw aside the sport that has been the occupation and passion of his life, and take to digging with a shovel for a dollar a day? How would your Yorkshire squire like that? He would not do it at all. He would expect the Government that deprived him of his land to give him a pension, however inadequate, and the wherewithal to keep body and soul together. He would go lounging about, in an apathetic fashion, trying to get as much for his money as possible at the Government stores; smoking a good deal; and being the reverse of communicative with the impertinent persons who came a few thousand miles to stare at him. And if the Government stopped his drink, and would not let him have even a glass of beer— But this is carrying the parallel to an impossibility: no existing Government could so far reduce Yorkshire; there would have been such an outburst of revolution as the world has never yet seen.

We set out on our return journey, taking another route over the high-lying prairie land. And at about the highest point we came to the burial-mound, or rather burial-house, of White Cow. When the old chief was dying, he said, "Bury me on a high place, where I can see the boats of the white men pass up and down the river." Was his friendly ghost sitting there, then, in the warm light of the afternoon, amid the fragrant scent of the May-weed? Anyhow, if White Cow could see any boats on the Missouri, his spectral eyes must have been keener than ours; for we could not see a sign of any craft whatsoever on that distant line of silver.

Strangely enough, we had just driven away from this spot when an object suddenly presented itself to our startled gaze which might have been White Cow himself "out for a dauner." A more ghastly spectacle was never seen than this old and withered Indian—a tall man, almost naked, and so shrunken and shrivelled that every bone in his body was visible; while the skin of the mummy-like face had

been pulled back from his mouth, so that he grinned like a spectre. He was standing apart from the road, quite motionless, and he carried nothing in his hand; but all the same, both our horses, at the same moment, plunged aside so as nearly to leave the path, and were not quieted for some minutes afterwards. We forgot to ask F—— if he knew this spectre, or whether it was really White Cow. Certainly, horses don't often shy because of the ghastly appearance of a human being.

That night we reached Decatur again, and had some more pelican of the wilderness and prunes. Then the women went up-stairs doubtless to have a talk about the promised addition to our party; and we went outside to listen to the conversation of the tall, uncouth, unkempt fellows who were seated on a bench, smoking. We heard a good deal about the Indian, and about the attempts to "civilize" him. From some other things we had heard out there, we had begun to wonder whether civilization was to be defined as the art of acquiring greenbacks without being too particular about the

means. However, it appears that on one point the Indians have outstripped civilization. The Indian women, who had in by-gone years sometimes to go on long marches with their tribe in time of war, are said to have discovered a secret which the fashionable women of Paris would give their ears to know. But they keep it a profound secret; so perhaps it is only a superstition.

CHAPTER XI.

SCHEMES.

SHALL we ever forget that sunrise over the vast plain through which the Missouri runs—the silence, and loneliness, and majesty of it? Far away, immeasurable leagues away it seemed, a bar of purple cloud appeared to rest on the earth, all along the flat horizon; while above that the broad expanse of sky began to glow with a pale lemon-yellow; the grassy plain below being of a deep, intense olive-green. No object in the distance was to be descried, except one narrow strip of forest; and the trees, just getting above the belt of purple, showed a serrated line of jet black on the pale yellow sky. Then a flush of rose-pink began to fill the east; and quite suddenly the wooden spire of the small church beside us—

the first object to catch the new light of the dawn—shone a pale red above the cold green of the cotton-trees. There was no one abroad at this hour in the wide streets of Decatur, though we had seen two Indians pass some little time before, with shovels over their shoulders. Our object in getting up so early was to try to get over the swampiest part of our journey before the heat of the day called up a plague of flies from the mud.

One thing or another, however, delayed our departure; and when at last we got into the swamps, we were simply enveloped in clouds of mosquitoes. If we could only have regarded these from behind a glass mask, we should have said that they formed a very beautiful sight, and so have discovered the spirit of good that lurks in that most evil thing. For we were in shadow—our vehicles having a top supported by slender iron poles arising from the sides—and, looking out from this shadow, the still air seemed filled with millions upon millions of luminous and transparent golden particles. Occasionally, we got up on a higher bit of

ground and could send the horses forward; the current thus produced relieving us from these clouds; but ordinarily our slow plunging through the mire left us an easy prey to these insatiable myriads. Indeed there were more mosquitoes within our vehicle—if that were possible—than in the same space without; for these creatures prefer to get into the shade when the blaze of the sun is fierce, though they do not show themselves grateful to those who afford it. The roof of our palanquin-phaeton was of blue cloth when we started. Before we had been gone an hour it was gray; there was not anywhere the size of a pea visible of the blue cloth. But this temporary retirement of a few millions in no wise seemed to diminish the numbers of those who were around us in the air. At last even the patience of the lieutenant broke down.

“Lady Sylvia,” said he, “I have now discovered why there is so much bad language in America. If ever we go up the Missouri again, you ladies must go in one carriage by yourselves, and we in another carriage; for the

frightful thing is that we cannot say what we think.”—And here he slaed his cheppek again, and slew another half-dozen of his enemies.

“ But why not speak ? ” his wife said.

“ *‘ It was an ancient privilege, my lords,
To fling whate’er we felt, not fearing, into words.’* ”

Lady Sylvia was supposed to say something ; but as she had tied a handkerchief tightly round her face, we could not quite make out what it was.

He continued to complain. We had delayed our return to Decatur on the previous day so that we should avoid driving on to Tekamah in the evening, when the plague is worse : he declared it could not be worse. He even complained that we had not suffered in this fashion a couple of days before, in driving over the same ground ; forgetting that then we had a fresh and pleasant breeze. And we were soon to discover what a breeze could do. Our friendly guide and driver suddenly plunged his horses off the path into a thicket of tall reeds. We thought we should have been eaten up alive at this point. But presently we got

through this wilderness and began to ascend a slope leading up to the bluffs. Was there not a scent of cooler air? We clambered higher and higher; we got among our old friends, the sun-flowers and Michaelmas-daisies; and, at last, when we emerged on to the sunlit and golden plain, the cool breeze, fragrant with May-weed, came sweeping along and through our vehicle, and, behold! we were delivered from our enemies. We waxed valiant. We attacked their last stronghold on the roof; we flicked off these gray millions; and they, too, flew away and disappeared. We sent a victorious halloo to the vehicle behind us, which was joyfully answered. We fell in love with the "rolling" prairies, and their beautiful flowers, and fresh breezes.

But the cup of human happiness is always dashed with some bitterness or another. We began to think about that vast and grassy swamp from which we had emerged. Was not that, in effect, part of the very Mississippi valley about which such splendid prophecies have been made? Our good friends out here,

though they made light of their river by calling it the Big Muddy, nevertheless declared that it was the parent of the Mississippi, and that the Mississippi should be called the Missouri from St. Louis right down to New Orleans. Had we, then, just struggled upward from one branch of the great basin which is to contain the future civilization of the world? We had been assured by an eminent (American) authority that nothing could "prevent the Mississippi valley from becoming, in less than three generations, the centre of human power." It was with pain and anguish that we now recalled these prophetic words. Our hearts grew heavy when we thought of our children's children. O ye future denizens of Alligator City, do not think that your forefathers have not also suffered, in getting through these mud-flats on an August day!

At length we got back to Tekamah and its conspicuous tree, which latter, it is said, has done the State some good service in former days. We were much too early for the train;

and so we had luncheon in the block-house inn (the lieutenant in vain offering a dollar for a single bottle of beer) and then went out to sit on a bench and watch the winged beetles that hovered in the sunshine and then darted about in a spasmodic fashion. That was all the amusement we could find in Tekamah. But they say that a newspaper exists there; and, if only the Government would open up a road to the Black Hills by way of the Elkhorn valley, Tekamah might suddenly arise and flourish. In the end, we left the darting beetles, and drove to the station. Here we saw two or three gangs of "civilized" Indians, digging for the railway company. Whether Pawnees, Omahas, or Winnibagoes, they were, in their tattered shirt and trousers, not an attractive-looking lot of people; whereas the gentlemen-paupers of the Reservations have at least the advantage of being picturesque in appearance. There were a few teepees on the slopes above, with some women and children. The whole very closely resembled a Gypsy encampment.

And then, in due course of time, we made our way back to Omaha, the capital of the Plains, the future Chicago of the West; and we were once more jolted over the unmade roads and streets which had now got dry and hard. And what was this?—another telegram?

Lady Sylvia took it calmly, and opened it with an air of pride.

“I thought so,” she said, with assumed indifference; and there was a certain superiority in her manner—almost bordering on triumph—as she handed the telegram to her friend. She seemed to say, “Of course, it is quite an ordinary occurrence for my husband to send me a telegram. There, you may all see on what terms we are. I am not a bit rejoiced that he has actually sailed, and on his way to join us.”

The word was passed round. Balfour’s telegram was from Queenstown, giving the name of the vessel by which he had sailed. There was nothing for her to be proud of in that; she did well to assume indifference.

But when, that evening, we were talking

about our further plans, she suddenly begged to be left out of the discussion.

"I mean to remain here until my husband arrives," said she.

"In Omaha!" we all cried—but there was really no disparagement implied in this ejaculation; for it must be acknowledged that Omaha, after its first reception of us, had treated us with the greatest kindness.

"He cannot be here for a fortnight at least," it is pointed out to her, "we could in that time go on to Idaho and be back here to meet him, if he does not wish, like the rest of us, to have a look at the Rocky Mountains."

"I cannot tell what his wishes may be," said the young wife, thoughtfully, "and there is no means of explaining to him where to find us if we move from here."

"There is every means," it is again pointed out. "All you have to do is to address a letter to the New York office of the line, and it will be given to him even before he lands."

This notion of sending a letter seemed to give her great delight. She spent the whole

of the rest of the evening in her own room ; no human being but him to whom they were addressed ever knew what were the outpourings of her soul on that occasion. Later on she came in to bid us good-night. She looked very happy ; but her eyes were red.

Then two members of our small party went out into the cool night air to smoke a cigar. The broad streets of Omaha were dark and deserted ; there were no roysterers going home ; no lights showing that the gambling-houses were still open ; the place was as quiet as a Surrey village on a Sunday morning when everybody is at church.

“ I have been thinking,” says one of them ; and this is a startling statement, for he is not much given that way. “ And what these ladies talk about Balfour doing when he comes out here—oh ! that is all stuff—that is all folly and nonsense. It is romantic—oh ! yes, it is very fine to think of ; and for an ordinary poor man it is a great thing to have 160 acres of freehold land—and very good land—from the Government ; and if he knows anything about farm-

ing, and if he and his family will work—that is very well. But it is only romantic folly to talk about that and Balfour together. His wife—it is very well for her to be brave, and say this thing and that thing; but it is folly; they cannot do that. That is the nonsense a great many people in England think—that, when they have failed at everything, they can farm. Oh, yes! I would like to see Lady Sylvia help to build a house, or to milk a cow even. But the other thing, that is a little more sensible. They say the Railway has beautiful grazing land—beautiful grazing land—that you can buy for a pound or thirty shillings an acre; and a man might have a large freehold estate for little. But the little is something; and there is the cost of the stock; and the taxes; and if Balfour had enough money for all that, how do you know that he will be able to make his fortune by stock-raising?”

“I don’t know anything about it.”

“No,” said the lieutenant with decision, “these things are only romantic folly. It is good for a labouring man who has a little

money to have a homestead from the Government, and work away; and it is good for a farmer who knows about cattle to buy acres from the Railway; and invest his money in cattle; and look after them. As for Balfour and his wife——”

A semi-circular streak of fire in the darkness—a wave of the hand indicated by the glowing end of the cigar—showed how the lieutenant disposed of that suggestion.

“Do you think,” said he after a time, —“you have known him longer than I have—do you think he is a proud man?”

“As regards his taking to some occupation or other?”

“Yes.”

“He will have to put his pride in his pocket. He is a reasonable man.”

“There was one thing that my wife and I talked of last night,” said the lieutenant, with a little hesitation; “but I am afraid to speak it, for it might be—impertinent. Still, to you I will speak it; you will say no more if you do not approve. You know, at the end of one

year, my wife and I we find ourselves with all this large property on our hands. Then we have to decide what to do with it."

"Sell every stick and stone of it, and take the proceeds back with you to England. You cannot manage such a property five thousand miles away. Bell's uncle, mind you, trusted to nobody; he was his own overseer and manager, and a precious strict one, if all accounts be true. You carry that money back to England; buy a castle in the Highlands, and an immense shooting; and ask me, each August, to look in on you about the 12th. That is what a sensible man would do."

"But wait a bit, my friend. This is what my wife says—yes, it is her notion—but she is very fearful not to offend. She says if this property is going on paying so well, and increasing every year, would it not be better for us to give some one a good salary to remain there and manage it for us? Do you see now? Do you see?"

"And that was your wife's notion? Well, it is a confoundedly clever one; but it was

her abounding good nature that led her to it. Unfortunately, there is a serious drawback. You propose to offer this post to Balfour."

"Gott bewahre!" exclaimed the lieutenant, almost angrily, for he was indeed 'fearful not to offend,' "I only say to you what is a notion—what my wife and I were speaking about—I would not have it mentioned for worlds—until, at least, I knew something about—about——"

"About the light in which Balfour would regard the offer. Unless he is an ass, which I don't believe, he would jump at it. But there is the one objection, as I say: Balfour probably knows as much about the raising of cattle as he knows about mining—which is nothing at all. And you propose to put all these things into his hands?"

"My good friend," said the lieutenant, "he is a man; he has eyes; he is a good horseman; he can learn. When he comes out here, let him stay with us. He has a year to learn. And do you suppose that Bell's uncle he himself looked after the cattle, and drove them this way and that, and sold them? No, no; no

more than he went down into the mines, and watched them at the work. If Balfour will do this—and it is only a notion yet—he will have to keep the accounts, and he will judge by the results what is going on right. And so we too. If it does not answer, we can sell. I think he is a patient steady man, who has resolution. And if he is too proud—if he is offended—we could make it an interest rather than salary—a per-centage on the year's profits——”

“ Well, if you ask me what I think of it, I consider that he is very lucky to have such a chance offered. He will live in the healthiest and most delightful climate in the world; he and his wife, who are both excessively fond of riding, will pass their lives on horseback; he may make some money; and then he will be able to come up here and go in for a little speculation in real estate, just by way of amusement. But, my dear young friend, allow me to point out that when you talk of the women's schemes as romantic, and of your wife's and yours as a matter of business, you try to throw dust into

the eyes of innocent folks. You are contemplating at present what is simply a magnificent act of charity."

"Then," said he, with real vexation, "it is all over. No, we will make him no such offer unless it is a matter of business; he will only resent it if it is a kindness."

"And are there many people, then, who are in such a wild rage to resent kindness? Where should we all be but for forbearance, and forgiveness, and charity? Is he a god that he is superior to such things?"

"You know him better than I do," is the gloomy response.

But the lieutenant, as we walked back to the hotel, was rather displeased that his proposal was not looked upon as a bit of smart commercial calculation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLAINS.

AND here, also, as at Chicago, the demon of speculation was nearly getting the better of our small and not by any means wealthy party. It was a terrible temptation to hear of all those beautiful grazing-lands close by in the Platte valley the freehold of which was to be purchased for a song. The fact is, things were rather bad at Omaha while we were there ; and although everybody tried to hang on to his real estate in hopes of better times, still the assessments pressed hard, and one could have very eligible "lots" at very small prices. No doubt there were ominous rumours about. We heard something, as we went further west, about county commissioners, elected by the homesteaders and pre-emptors who are free from

taxation, going rather wild in the way of building roads, schools, and bridges, at the cost of the mere speculators. It was said that these very non-resident speculators, whose ranks we had been tempted to join, were the curse of the country; and that all laws passed to tax them, and to relieve the real residents, were just. Very well; but what was that other statement about the arrears of taxes owing by these unhappy wretches? Was it fair of the Government of any State or any country in the world to sell such debts by auction, and give the buyer the right of extorting 40 per cent. per annum until the taxes were paid? We regarded our friends. We hinted that this statement was a capital credulometer. The faith that can accept it is capable of anything.

These profound researches into the condition of public affairs in Omaha, during the further day or two we lingered there, were partly owing to vague dreams of the pleasure of proprietorship, but no doubt they were partly due to the notion that had got into the heads of one or two of our party that the idyllic life

of a shepherd in the Platte valley must be a very fine thing. The lieutenant combated this notion fiercely; and begged Lady Sylvia to wait until she had seen the harshness of life even amid the comparative luxury of a well-appointed ranch. Lady Sylvia retorted gently that we had no further knowledge of life at a ranch than herself; that she had attentively listened to all that had been said about the subject by our friends in Omaha; that harshness of living was a relative thing; and that she had no doubt Bell and her husband would soon get used to it, and would not complain.

"Oh no, she will not complain," said he lightly. "She is very reasonable—she is very sensible. She will never be reconciled to the place, while her children are away; and she will have a great deal of crying by herself; but she will not complain."

"Nor would any woman," said Lady Sylvia, boldly. "She is acting rightly; she is doing her duty; I think that women are far more capable of giving up luxuries they have been accustomed to than men are."

This set the lieutenant thinking. On the morning on which we left Omaha, he came aside, and said—

“I, too, have written a letter to Mr. Balfour: shall I post it?”

“What is in it?”

“The proposal I told you of the other night—but very—very—what do you call it?—round-about. I have said perhaps he is only coming out to take his wife home sooner than you go—that is well. I have said perhaps he is waiting until the firm starts again; if that is any use, when they must have been losing for years. Again, that is well. But I have said perhaps he is coming to look how to start a business—an occupation; if that is so, will he stay with us a year—see if he understands—then he will take the management and have a yearly percentage. I have said it is only a passing thought; but we will ask Lady Sylvia to stay with us at Idaho until we hear from him. He can telegraph from New York. He will tell her to remain until he comes; or to meet him somewhere; I will get

some one to accompany her. What do you say?"

"Post the letter."

"It will be very pleasant for us," said he, in a second or so, as he rubbed his hands in an excited fashion, "to have them out for our neighbours for a year at the least—it will be pleasant for Bell—how can she get any one in Denver, or Idaho, to know all about her children, and Surrey? My dear friend, if you have any sense, you will stay with us too. I will show you bears."

He spoke as if he were already owner of the Rocky Mountains.

"And we will go down to Kansas—a great party, with covered waggon, and picnics, and much amusement—for a buffalo hunt. And then we will go up to the Parks in the middle of the mountains—what it is is this, I tell you: if our stay here is compulsive, we will make it as amusing as possible, if you will see, if only you will stay the year too."

A sigh was the answer.

And now, as we again set out on our journey

westward, the beautiful prairie-country seemed more beautiful than ever; and we caught glimpses of the fertile valley of the Platte, in which our imaginary freehold estates lay awaiting us. On and on we went, with the never-ending undulations of grass and flowers glowing all around us in the sunlight; the world below a plain of gold, the world above a vault of the palest blue. The space, and light, and colour were altogether most cheerful; and as the train went at a very gentle trot along the single line, we sate outside, for the most part, in the cool breeze. Occasionally we passed a small hamlet; and that had invariably an oddly extemporised look. The wooden houses were stuck down anyhow on the grassy plain; without any trace of the old-fashioned orchards, and walled gardens, and hedges, that bind, as it were, an English village together. Here there was but the satisfaction of the most immediate needs. One wooden building labelled "Drug Store," another wooden building labelled "Grocery Store," and a blacksmith's shop were ordinarily the chief features of the community. All day

we passed in this quiet gliding onwards; and when the sun began to sink towards the horizon, we found ourselves in the midst of a grassy plain, apparently quite uninhabited and of boundless extent. As the western sky deepened in its gold and green, and as the sun actually touched the horizon, the level light hit across this vast plain in long shafts of dull fire, just catching the tops of the taller rushes near us, and touching some distant sandy slopes into a pale crimson. Lower and lower the sun sank, until it seemed to eat a bit out of the horizon, so blinding was the light; while far above, in a sea of luminous green, lay one long narrow cloud, an island of blood-red.

In a second, when the sun sank, the world seemed to grow quite dark. All around us the prairie-land had become of a cold, heavy, opaque green; and the only objects which our bewildered eyes could distinguish were some pale white flowers, like the tufts of canna on a Scotch moor. But presently, and to our intense surprise, the world seemed to leap up again into light and colour. This after-glow

was most extraordinary. The immeasurable plains of grass became suffused with a rich olive green; the western sky was all a radiance of lemon-yellow and silvery gray; while along the eastern horizon—the most inexplicable thing of all—there stretched a great band of smoke-like purple and pink. We soon became familiar with this phenomenon out in the West—this appearance of a vast range of roseate Alps along the eastern horizon where there was neither mountain nor cloud. It was merely the shadow of the earth, projected by the sunken sun into the earth's atmosphere. But it was an unforgettable thing, this mystic belt of colour far away in the east over the dark earth, and under the pale and neutral hues of the sky.

The interior of a Pullman sleeping-car, after the stalwart coloured gentleman has lowered the shelves, and made the beds, and drawn the curtains, presents a strange sight. The great folds of the dusky curtains, in the dim light of a lamp, move in a mysterious manner, showing the contortions of the human beings within,

who are trying to dispossess themselves of their garments ; while occasionally a foot is shot into the outer air so that the owner can rid himself of his boot. But within these gloomy recesses there is sufficient comfort ; and he who is wakeful can lie and look out on the gathering stars as they begin to come out over the dark prairie-land. All through the night this huge snake, with its eyes of yellow fire, creeps across the endless plain. If you wake up before the dawn, and look out, behold ! the old familiar conditions of the world are gone, and the Plough is standing on its head. But still more wonderful is the later awakening, when the yellow sunlight of the morning is shining over the prairies, and when within this long caravan there is a confused shuffling and dressing, everybody wanting to get outside to get a breath of the fresh air. And what is this we find around us now ? The vast plain of grass is beautiful in the early light, no doubt ; but our attention is quickened by the sight of a drove of antelope which trot lightly and carelessly away towards some low and sandy bluffs in the

distance. That solitary object out there seems at first to be a huge vulture; but by-and-by it turns out to be a prairie-wolf—a coyote—sitting on its hind legs and chawing at a bone. The chicken-hawk lifts its heavy wings as we go by, and flies across the plain. And here are the merry and familiar little prairie-dogs—half-rabbit and half-squirrel—that look at us each from his little hillock of sand, and then pop into their hole only to reappear again when we have passed. Now the long swathes of green and yellow-brown are broken by a few ridges of gray rock; and these in some places have patches of orange-red lichen that tell against the pale blue sky. It is a clear, beautiful morning; even those who have not slept well through the slow rumbling of the night soon get freshened up on these high, cool plains.

At Sydney we suddenly came upon an oasis of brisk and busy life in this immeasurable desert of grass; and of course it was with an eager curiosity that we looked at these first indications of the probable life of our friend the ranchwoman. For here were immense

herds of cattle brought in from the plains ; and large pens and enclosures ; and the picturesque herders, with their big boots and broad-rimmed hats, spurring about on their small and wiry horses.

“ Shall you dress in buckskin ? ” asked Lady Sylvia of our lieutenant, “ and will you flourish about one of those long whips ? ”

“ Oh no,” said he, “ I understand my business will be a very tame one—all at a desk.”

“ Until we can get some trustworthy person to take the whole management,” said Bell, gently, and looking down.

“ What handsome fellows they are ! ” the lieutenant cried. “ It is a healthy life—look at the keen, brown faces, the flat back, the square shoulders ; and not a bit of fat on them. I should like to command a regiment of those fellows—fancy what cavalry they would make—light, wiry, splendid riders—you could do something with a regiment of those fellows, I think ! Lady Sylvia, did I ever tell you what two of my company—the dare-devils !—did at — ? ”

Lady Sylvia had never heard that legend of 1870; but she listened to it now with a proud and eager interest; for she had never forsaken, even at the solicitation of her husband, her championship of the Germans.

“I will write a ballad about it some day,” said the lieutenant, with a laugh. “*Es ritt' zwei Uhlanen wohl über den Rhein* ——”

“Yes!” said Lady Sylvia, with a flash of colour leaping to her face, “it *was* well over the Rhine—it was indeed well over the Rhine, that they and their companions got before they thought of going home again!”

“Ah, yes,” said he, humbly, “but it is only the old see-saw. To-day it is Paris; to-morrow it is Berlin that is taken. The only thing is, that this time I think we have secured a longer interval than usual—the great fortresses we have taken will keep us secure for many a day to come—our garrisons are armies; they cannot be surprised by treachery—and so long as we have the fortresses, we need not fear any invasion ——”

“But you took them by force: why should

not the French take them back by force?" his wife said.

"I think we should not be likely to have that chance again," said he; "the French will take care not to fall into that condition again. But we are now safe, and for a long time, because we have their great fortresses, and then our own line of the Rhine fortresses as well. It is the double gate to our house; and we have locked all the locks, and bolted all the bars. And yet we are not going to sleep."

We were again out on the wide and tenantless plains; and Bell was looking with great curiosity at the sort of land in which she was to find her home, for over there on the left the long undulations disappeared away into Colorado. And though these yellow and gray-green plains were cheerful enough in the sunshine, still they were very lonely. No trace of any living thing was visible—not even an antelope or the familiar little prairie-dog. Far as the eye could reach on this high-lying plateau, there was nothing but the tufts of withered-looking buffalo-grass, with here and there a bleached

skull or the ribs of a skeleton breaking the monotony of the expanse. The lieutenant, who was watching the rueful expression of his wife's face, burst out laughing.

"You will have elbow-room out here, eh?" said he. "You will not crowd your neighbours off the pavement."

"I suppose we shall have no neighbours at all," said she.

"But at Idaho you will have plenty," said he; "it is a great place of fashion, I am told; it is even more fashionable than Denver. Ah, Lady Sylvia, we will show you something now. You have lived too much out of the world, in that quiet place in Surrey. Now we will show you fashion, life, gaiety!"

"Is it bowie-knives or pistols that the gentlemen mostly use in Denver?" asked Lady Sylvia, who did not like to hear her native Surrey despised.

"Bowie-knives! Pistols!" exclaimed the lieutenant, with some indignation. "When they fight a duel now, it is with tubes of rose-water. When they use dice, it is to say which

of them will go away as missionaries to Africa—oh, it is quite true—I have heard many things of the reformation of Denver. The singing-saloons they are all chapels now. All the people meet once in the forenoon and once in the afternoon to hear an exposition of one of Shakespere's plays ; and the rich people they have sent all their money away to be spent on blue china. All the boys are studying to become bishops—”

He suddenly ceased his nonsense, and grasped his wife's arm. Some object outside had caught his attention—she instantly turned to the window, as we all did ; and there, at the distant horizon, we perceived a pale, transparent line of blue. You may be sure we were not long inside the carriage after that. The delight of finding something to break the monotony of the plains was boundless ; we clung to the iron barrier outside, and craned our necks this way and that, so that we could see from farthest north to farthest south the shadowy, serrated range of the Rocky Mountains. The blue of them appeared to be about as translucent as

the silvery light in which they stood ; we could but vaguely make out the snow-peaks in that long serrated line ; they were as a bar of cloud along the horizon. And yet we could not help resting our eyes on them with a great relief and interest, as we pressed on to Cheyenne, at which point we were to break our journey and turn to the south. It was about mid-day when we reached that city, which was a famous place during the construction of the Union Pacific Railway, and which has even now some claim to distinction. It is with a pardonable pride that its inhabitants repeat the name it then acquired, and all right to which it has by no means abandoned. The style and title in question is, "Hell on wheels."

CHAPTER XIII.

“HELL ON WHEELS.”

WE step out from the excellent little railway-hotel, in which we have taken up our quarters, on to the broad platform, and into the warm light of the afternoon.

“Bell,” says our gentle Queen T., looking rather wistfully along the pale rampart of the Rocky Mountains, “these are the walls of your future home. Will you go up to the top of an evening, and wave a handkerchief to us?—and we will try to answer you from Mickleham Downs.”

“On Christmas-night we will send you many a message,” said Bell, looking down.

“And my husband and myself,” said Lady Sylvia, quite simply, “you will let us join in that too?”

"But do you expect to be out here till Christmas?" said Bell, with well-affected surprise.

"I don't think my husband would come to America," said Lady Sylvia, in the most matter-of-fact way, "after what has happened, unless he meant to stay."

"Oh, if you could only be near us!" cried Bell; but she dared not say more.

"That would be very pleasant," Lady Sylvia answered, with a smile, "but of course I don't know what my husband's plans are. We shall know our way more clearly when he comes to Idaho. It will seem so strange to sit down and shape one's life anew; but I suppose a good many people have got to do that."

By this time the lieutenant had secured a carriage, which was standing at the end of the platform, along with a pony for himself.

"Now, Mrs. von Rosen," said he, "are you ready? Guess you've come up from the ranch to have a frolic? Got your dollars ready for the gambling-saloons?"

"And if I have?" said she, boldly. "They

are licensed by the Government : why should I not amuse myself in these places ? ”

“ Madam,” replied her husband, sternly, “ the Puritan nation into which you have married permits of no such vices. Cheyenne must follow Homburg, Wiesbaden, Baden-Baden——”

“ No doubt,” said the sharper-tongued of our women-folk, who invariably comes to the assistance of her friend, “ no doubt that will follow when your pious Emperor has annexed the State.”

“ I beg your pardon, Madame,” says the lieutenant, politely, “ but Wyoming is not a State, it is only a territory.”

“ I don’t suppose it would matter,” she retorts carelessly, “ if the Hohenzollerns could get their hands on it anyhow. But, never mind. Come along, Bell, and let us see what sort of neighbours you are likely to have.”

They were no doubt rather rough-looking fellows, those gentlemen who lounged about the doors of the drinking-saloons ; but there were more picturesque figures visible in the

open thoroughfares, riding along on stalwart little ponies, the horsemen bronzed of face, clad mostly in buckskin, and with a good deal of ornament about their saddle and stirrups. As for Cheyenne itself, there was certainly nothing about its outward appearance to entitle any one to call it “Hell on wheels.” Its flat rectangular streets were rather dismal in appearance; there seemed to be little doing even in the drinking-saloons. But brisker times, we were assured, were at hand. The rumours about the gold to be had in the Black Hills would draw to this point the adventurers of many lands, as free with their money as with their language. Here they would fit themselves out with the wagons and weapons necessary for the journey up to the Black Hills; here they would return—the Sioux permitting—to revel in the delights of keno, and poker, and Bourbon whiskey. Cheyenne would return to its pristine glory, when life—so long as you could cling on to it—was a brisk and exciting business. Certainly the Cheyenne we saw was far from being an exciting place. It was in vain that

we implored our Bell to step down and bowie-knife somebody, or do something to let us understand what Cheyenne was in happier times. There was not a single corpse lying at any of the saloon-doors, nor any duel being fought in any street. The glory had departed.

But when we got away from these few chief thoroughfares, and got to the outskirts of Cheyenne, we were once more forcibly reminded of our native land ; for a better representation of Epsom Downs on the morning after the Derby-day could not be found anywhere, always with the difference that here the land is flat and arid. The odd fashion in which these wooden shanties and sheds—with some private houses here and there—are dotted down anyhow on the plain ; their temporary look ; the big advertisements ; the desolate and homeless appearance of the whole place—all served to recall that dismal scene that is spread around the Grand Stand when the revellers have all returned to town. By-and-by, however, the last of these habitations disappeared, and we found ourselves out on a flat and sandy

plain, that was taking a warm tinge from the gathering colour in the west. The Rocky Mountains were growing a bit darker in hue now; and that gave them a certain grandeur of aspect, distant as they were. But what was this strange thing ahead of us, far out on the plain? A cloud of dust rises into the golden air; we can hear the faint foot-falls of distant horses. The cloud comes nearer; the noise deepens; now it is the thunder of a troop of men on horseback, galloping down upon us as if to sweep us from the road.

"Forward, scout!" cried Bell, who had been getting up her Indian lore, to her husband on the pony; "hold up your right hand and motion them back—if they are friendly they will retire. Tell them the Great Father of the white men is well-disposed towards his red children——"

"—— and wouldn't cheat them out of a dollar even if he could get a third term of office by it——"

But by this time the enemy had borne down upon us with such swiftness that he had gone

right by before we could quite make out who he was. Indeed, amid such dust the smartest cavalry-uniforms in the U.S. army must soon resemble a digger's suit.

We pushed on across the plain, and soon reached the point which these impetuous riders had just left—Fort Russell. The lieutenant was rather anxious to see what style of fortification the U.S. Government adopted to guard against any possible raid on the part of the Indians exasperated by the encroachments of the miners among the Black Hills; and so we all got down and entered Fort Russell, and had a pleasant walk round in the cool evening air. We greatly admired the pretty little houses built for the quarters of the married officers, and we appreciated the efforts made to get a few cottonwood trees to grow on this arid soil; but as for fortifications, there was not so much as a bit of red-tape surrounding the enclosure. Our good friend who had conducted us hither only laughed when the lieutenant expressed his surprise.

“The Indians would as soon think of in-

vading Washington as coming down here," said he.

"But they have come before," observed the lieutenant, "and that not very long ago. How many massacres did they make when the railway was being built——"

"Then there were fewer people—Cheyenne was only a few shanties——"

"Cheyenne!" cried the lieutenant, "Cheyenne a defence?—a handful of Indians they would drive every shopkeeper out of the place in an hour——"

"I don't know about that," responded our companion for the time being. "The most of the men about here, Sir, I can assure you, have had their tussels with the Indians, and could make as good a stand as any soldiers could. But the Sioux won't come down here; they will keep to the hills, where we can't get at them."

"My good friend, this is what I cannot understand, and you will tell me," said the lieutenant, who was arguing only to obtain information. "You are driving the Indians

to desperation. You make treaties ; you allow the miners to break them ; you send out your soldiers to massacre the Indians because they have killed the white men who had no right to come on their land. Very well : in time you will no doubt get them all killed. But suppose that the chiefs begin to see what is the end of it ; and if they say that they must perish, but that they will perish in a great act of revenge, and if they sweep down here to cut your railway-line to pieces—which has brought all these people out—and to ravage Cheyenne, then what is the use of such forts as this Fort Russell and its handful of soldiers ? What did I see in a book the other day—that the fighting-men of these Indians alone were not less than 8000 or 10,000 ; because the young men of the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail people could easily be got to join the Sioux ; and if they are to die, why should they not do some splendid thing ? ”

“ Well, Sir,” said our friend, patting the neck of one of his horses, as the ladies were getting into the carriage, “ that would be fine

—that would be striking in a book or a play. But you don't know the Indians. The Indians are cowards, Sir—take my word for it; and they don't fight except for plunder. They are revengeful—oh yes; and malicious as snakes; but they wouldn't kill a man unless they could get his rifle, or his oxen, or something. The young men are different sometimes—they want scalps to make themselves big in the eyes of the gals; but you wouldn't find a whole tribe of Indians flinging their lives away just to make a fuss in the New York papers."

At this point we started off again across the plains; and the discussion was adjourned, as the Irish magistrate said, *sine die* until the evening. Only Bell was anxious to be assured that if Sitting Bull and his merry men should meditate one grand and final act of revenge they would not make their way down to the plains of Colorado, and take up their abode there; and she was greatly comforted when she heard that the chief trouble of the Government was that it could not get the Indians to forsake their native hills in the north

and go down to the Indian territory in the south.

"I think, Mrs. Von Rosen," said Lady Sylvia, "that you will have some romantic stories to tell your children when you return to England. You would feel very proud if you compelled the Indians to address you as 'Brave Squaw! Brave Squaw!'"

"I can assure you I am not at all anxious to become a heroine," our Bell said, seriously; no doubt remembering that romantic incidents have sometimes a knack of leaving children motherless.

And now "the Rockies" had grown quite dramatic in their intensity of plum-colour; and there were flashing shoots of crimson fire high over the dusky peaks. But as we were driving eastward, we saw even more beautiful colours on the other horizon; for there were huge soft masses of colour that had their high ridges of snow touched with a pale saffron as the light went down. And then, when the sun had really sunk, we found that strange phenomenon again appear along the eastern horizon—a band of

dull dead blue lying close to the land, where no clouds were, and fading into a warm crimson above. Had this belt of coloured shadow been a belt of mountains, we should have estimated them to be about 5000 feet above the level of these plains, which are themselves 5000 or 6000 feet above the level of the sea ; and a strange thing was that this dusky blue and the crimson above remained well into the twilight, when all the world around us was growing dark. It was in this wan twilight that we drove out to a lake which will no doubt form an ornamental feature in a big park when the Black Hills miners, gorged with wealth, come back to make Cheyenne a great city. The chief attraction of the lake, as we saw it, was the presence of a considerable number of wild-duck on the surface ; but we did not stay long to look at them, for the reason that there were several boats out after them, and the tiny jets of pink fire that were from time to time visible in the silvery twilight showed that the occupants of the boats were firing pretty much at random. As we did not wish to have a charge of No. 5

shot for supper we drove off, and eventually were landed at the railway inn at Cheyenne.

We were quite conscious of having done an injustice to "Hell on wheels" in taking only this cursory glance at so famous a place; but then we knew that all our letters—and perhaps telegrams—were now at Idaho; and we wished to get on as soon as possible. But as the present writer was unanimously requested by the party to pay a tribute of gratitude to the clean and comfortable little inn at the station, he must now do so; only he must also confess that he was bribed, for the good-natured landlord was pleased, as we sat at supper, to send in to us, with his compliments, a bottle of real French champagne. Good actions should never go unrewarded; and so the gentle reader is most earnestly entreated, the first time he goes to Cheyenne—in fact, he is entreated to go to Cheyenne anyhow—to stay at this inn, and give large orders. Moreover, the present writer, not wishing to have his conduct in this particular regarded as being too mercenary, would wish to explain that the bottle of champagne in

question was, as we subsequently discovered, charged for in the bill, and honestly paid for too; but he cannot allow the landlord to be deprived of all credit for his hospitable intentions merely on account of an error on the part of the clerk. We drank to his health then; and we will do so now. Here is to your health, Mr. —; and to yours, you kind friend, who showed us the non-fortified Fort Russell; and to yours, you young Canadian gentleman, who told us those sad stories about Denver; and we hereby invoke a malison on the Grand Central Hotel of that city, on account of its cockroaches, and its vinous decoctions, and its incivility—but all this is highly improper, and premature, and a breach of confidence.

We did indeed spend a pleasant evening that night at Cheyenne; for we had ordered for our banquet all the strangest dishes on the bill of fare, just to give our friends a notion of the sort of food they would have to encounter during their stay in the West. And then these steaks of antelope, and mountain-sheep, and black-tailed deer derived a certain romance from

the presence, on the walls of the room, of splendid heads and antlers, until it appeared to us that we must be mighty hunters just sitting down to supper with the trophies won by our own sword and spear hung up around us. And then our Prussian strategist—who had acquired such a vast and intimate acquaintance with the Indians from his conversation with the Omaha idiot—proceeded to explain to us his plan of an Indian campaign; which showed that he was quite fitted to take the command of all the red men in Dacotah. We were treated to a dose of history, too; to show that in desperation the Indians have often risen to commit a general massacre, apparently with no ulterior motive whatever. And, of course, when Sitting Bull had swept down on Cheyenne and drank its taverns dry; and when he had swept down on Denver, and filled his pockets—if any—with sham French jewellery, surely he would come up to Idaho, to pay a certain young lady a friendly call?

“Bell,” said her husband, “you shall have a laurel-wreath ready; and you will have all

the neighbours trained and ready ; and when the great chief approaches you will all burst out with, ' Heil dir im Siegerkranz ! ' "

" In the mean time," said Bell, sedately, " if we are to catch the train for Denver at five in the morning, we had better get to bed."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN SOCIETY.

FIVE in the morning—pitch darkness all around the station—a clear starlit sky—the flashing belt and sword of Orion almost right overhead. We had our breakfast of bread and apples in the great, empty saloon; then we went out on to the platform, wondering when the Cyclops eye of the train would come flaring through the dark. For now we were within a few hours' journey of the point to which those messages were to be directed which would finally set at rest one or two grave problems; and there was a good deal of nervousness visible among our women-folk when we touched on these probabilities. But Lady Sylvia showed no nervousness at all. She was eager, buoyant, confident. She was clearly not afraid of any

telegram or letter that might be awaiting her at Denver. Nay, when her friends, shivering in the cold and darkness of the early morning, were complaining of the railway arrangements that compelled us to get up at such an hour, she made light of the matter, and showed how as we went south we should have the beautiful spectacle of the sunrise breaking on the Rocky Mountains.

At length the train came along, and we got into the warm carriage, in which the conductor was engaged in cramming a blazing stove with still further blocks of wood. Very soon we were away from the scattered shanties of Cheyenne—out on the lone prairie-land that was to be our Bell's future home. And as we sate and silently looked out of the windows, watching a pale glow arise in the east, and trying to make out something on the dark plains below, suddenly we caught sight of some flashing lights of red and yellow. These were the breakfast fires of some travellers camping out—probably miners or traders making for the Black Hills with a train of wagons and oxen.

The light in the east increased ; and then we saw all along the western horizon the great wall of the Rocky Mountains become visible in a stream of colour—the peaks the faintest rose, the shadowy bulk below a light, transparent, beautiful blue. The morning came on apace, the silvery grays of the east yielding to a glowing saffron. There seemed to be no mists lying on these high plains ; for as the sun rose, we could see an immense distance over the yellow prairie-land. And the first objects we perceived in this lonely desert of grass were a number of antelope quietly grazing within rifle-range of the railway-line, taking no heed whatever, though occasionally one of the more timid would trot off on its spider-like legs to a safer distance. Bell began to laugh. She saw the misery of her husband's face.

“ Ah, well,” said he, with a sigh, “ I suppose if the train were to stop, and you went down with a gun, they would be away like lightning. *But a time will come ;* and your husband, Lady Sylvia, will be with me to help me, I hope.”

There was certainly no misery on Lady

Sylvia's face, now that the brilliant light of the new day filled the carriage. Was this the pale sad soul who had come away from England with us, out of sorts with the world, and almost aweary of her life? There was a colour in her cheeks that nearly rivalled Bell's apple-blossom tints. There was an unusual gladness in her eyes this morning that we could not at first account for; but she let the secret out; she had been making elaborate calculations. The telegram she received at Omaha from Queenstown had been waiting for her two days before she got it. Then, taking into account the number of days we stayed at Omaha and the leisurely fashion in which we had come across the plains, there was at least a chance—so she proved to herself—that her husband might at that very moment be landing at one of the New York wharves. It all depended on the steamer. Who knew anything about that steamer? Notoriously it belonged to the fastest of all the lines. Was it possible, then, that as we were chatting and laughing in this railway-carriage on the Colorado prairies, Balfour might be on the same

continent with us? You could almost have imagined that his stepping ashore had communicated some strange magnetic thrill to his wife's heart.

"We are getting near to Greeley now," said Queen T. to her friend Bell, looking rather eagerly out of the window.

"Yes," said the practical lieutenant, "and we shall have twenty minutes there for a real breakfast. An apple and a bit of bread is not enough, if you are travelling in Colorado air."

But I do not think it was altogether the breakfast—though that, as it turned out, was excellent—that led us to look out with unusual interest for this little township set far among the western plains; there were other reasons, which need not be mentioned here. And indeed we have the most pleasant memories of Greeley, as it shone there in the early sunlight. We walked up the broad main thoroughfare, with its twin rows of cottonwood-trees; and no doubt the empty street gained something from the fact that the end of it seemed closed in by the pale blue line of the Rocky Moun-

tains, the peaks here and there glittering with snow. A bright, clean, thriving-looking place, with its handsome red-brick school-house and its capacious white church ; while many of the shanties about had pleasant little gardens attached, watered by small irrigation-canals from the Cache-la-poudre river. As we were passing one of those tiny streams a great heron rose slowly into the air, his heavy wings flapping, his legs hanging down ; but a large hawk, crossing a field beyond, took no notice of him ; and we were disappointed of a bit of extempore falconry. We had only a look at the public park, which is as yet mostly a wilderness of underwood ; and a glimpse at the pretty villas beyond ; in fact, our explorations nearly lost us our train. As we think of Greeley now—here in England in the depth of winter—it shines for us still in the light of the summer morning, and the trees and fields are green around it, and the mountains are blue under the blue of the sky. May it shine and flourish for ever !

It is most unfair of the Americans to speak slightly of Denver. It is a highly respect-

able city. We were quite astounded, on our first entrance, by the number of people who appeared in black coats and tall hats; and the longer we stayed in the place the more we were impressed by the fashion in which the Denverites had removed the old stains from their reputation by building churches. They have advanced much further in the paths of civilization than the slow-moving cities of the East. In New York or Boston hotels the servants merely claim a free-and-easy equality with the guests; in Denver they have got far beyond that. The wines are such triumphs of skilful invention as no city in the world can produce. And then, when one goes into the streets (to escape from the beetles in one's bedroom) the eye is charmed by the variety of nationalities everywhere visible. A smart Mexican rides by, with gaily-decorated saddle, on his long-tailed pony. Chinese women hobble on their small shoes into an ironmongery-shop. The adjoining saloon is called "Zur goldenen Trauben;" and at the door of it a red-haired Irishwoman is stormily quarrelling with an

angry but silent and sulky negress. Over this seething admixture of population dwell the twelve patrician families of Denver—shining apart like stars in a silent heaven of their own. We were not permitted to gaze upon any one of these—unless—unless? Those two people who stood on the steps of the hotel after dinner? They were distinguished-looking persons, and much be-diamonded. The lady wore beautiful colours; and the red-faced gentleman had a splendid gold chain round his neck; and thus—so far as we could make out—they spake.

“Jim,” said the lady, “don’t you remember that hop of Steve Bellerjean’s, that he giv after he run away wi’ Dan Niggles’s gal—to make up all around, when he found pay-gravel, and married the gal?”

“No,” said the other, reflectively, “I disremember.”

“Well, that woman in yaller fixins, that stared at me all dinner, I could swear was Steve’s woman.”

“But Steve run away from her,” said the

gentleman, who seemed to remember some things, if not the hop. "She didn't pan out well. Tried to put a head on him with a revolver—jealousy, and rum. Steve went to Sonora; tried to bust the Government; and the greasers ketched him with a lariat, and his chips were passed in."

The gentleman in the gold chain had suddenly grown melancholy.

"Yes; Steve's chips were called," chimed in his spouse.

"That's what's the matter with all of us," continued her companion, in a sad tone. "That's what no fifteenth amendment can stop—the chips must be paid. That's what I told the boys down at Gridiron Bend, when I giv my experiences, and jined the church, and Euchre-Deck Billy heaved that rock into the christenin-place, sez I, Boys, sez I, life gen'rally begins with a square deal, leastways outside the idiot asylum. 'Cordin as you play your hand, will the promises be kep'. Sure enough, some has aces, and some not, and that's luck; and four aces any day is as good a hand as the ten

commandments. With four aces, I'd buck agin the devil. But we don't have four aces in the first deal, unless mebbe the Czar of Russia, or the Prince of Wales, or some of them chaps; and so life and religion is pretty much as we play the hand we've got."

The lady seemed to put another aspect on these moral truths.

"Hosea Kemp," said she, practically, "that pig-skinned Mormon fraud, diskivered that when you raised him ten thousand, and raked in his pile; and he had a full, and you were only king high."

"That was before I knowed better, and I hadn't seen the vanities," said the repentant sinner. "But when I played, I played my hand for all that it was worth; and that's what's the matter with me. You kent fool away your hand and keep the chips—and that's what you find in the commandments. That's the idee." What the idea was we were rather at a loss to discover; but we were not exactly in search of conundrums at this moment.

Indeed our arrival at Denver had put an end

for the time being to our idling and day dreaming. First of all there were the letters (there were no telegrams for any one, so we imagined that Balfour had not yet reached New York), and in the general selfishness of each seizing his or her own packet no one noticed the expression with which Lady Sylvia broke open the only envelope addressed to her. There was a turmoil of news from home—mostly of a domestic and trivial nature, but none the less of tremendous importance to the two mothers. And when they turned to Lady Sylvia, she was sitting there quite calm and undisturbed, without any trace of disappointment on her face.

“So Mr. Balfour has not reached New York yet?” said Queen T., in her gentle way.

“I suppose not,” was the answer. “I was calculating on the very shortest time possible. This letter was written some time before he left England—it is only about business affairs.”

It was not until that evening that Lady Sylvia communicated the contents of this letter to her friend; and she did so without complaint

as to the cold and formal manner in which her husband had written. Doubtless, she said, he was perfectly right. She had left him of her own accord; she deserved to be treated as a stranger. But the prompt answer to her message to him convinced her—this she said with a happy confidence in her eyes—of the spirit in which he was now coming out to her; and if, when he came out here, she had only five minutes given to her to tell him—— But the present writer refuses to reveal further the secrets that passed between these two women.

In fact, he would probably never have known, but that at this juncture he was privately appealed to for advice. And if, in the course of this faithful narrative, he has endeavoured as far as possible to keep himself in the background, and to be the mere mouthpiece and reporter of the party, that *rôle* must be abandoned for a moment. He must explain that he now found himself in a position of some difficulty. Balfour had written out to Lady Sylvia informing her of the collapse of his father's firm. It was hopeless, he said, to think of the firm re-

suming business ; the trade that had made his father's fortune was played out. In these circumstances he considered himself bound to give up everything he possessed to his creditors ; and he wished to know whether she, Lady Sylvia, would feel disposed to surrender in like manner the £50,000 settled on her before her marriage. He pointed out to her that she was not legally bound to do so ; and that it was a very doubtful question whether she was morally bound ; it was a matter for her private feeling. If she felt inclined to give up the money, he would endeavour to gain her father's consent. But he thought that would be difficult, unless she also would join in persuading him ; and she might point out that, if he refused, she could in any case pay over the annual interest of the sum. He hoped she was well ; and there an end.

Now if Lady Sylvia had had a bank-note for £50,000 in her pocket, she would have handed it over with a glad heart. She never doubted for a moment that she ought to pay over the money — especially as she now knew that it was her

husband's wish ; but this reference to her father rather bewildered her, and so she indirectly appealed for counsel.

Now how was it possible to explain to this gentle creature that the principle on which an ante-nuptial settlement is based is that the wife is literally purchased for a sum of money ; and that it is the bounden duty of the trustees to see that this purchase-money shall not be inveigled away from her in any manner whatever ? How was it possible to point out to her that she might have children ; and that her husband and father were alike bound by their duties as trustees not to let her defraud these helpless things of the future ? Nay more : it would be necessary to tell her that these hypothetical young people might marry ; and that, however they might love their mamma, papa, and grandpapa, some cantankerous son-in-law could suddenly come down on the papa and grandpapa and compel them to make good that money which they had allowed, in defiance of their trust, to be dissipated in an act of Quixotic sacrifice.

"I always thought the law was idiotic," says Queen T.

"The law in this case is especially devoted to the protection of women, who are not supposed to be able to take care of themselves."

"Do you mean to say that if Lady Sylvia, to whom the money belongs, wishes to give it up, she cannot give it up?"

"It does not belong to her; it belongs to Balfour and Lord Willowby, in trust for her; and they dare not give it up, except at their own risk. What Balfour meant by making himself a trustee can only be imagined; but he is a shrewd fellow."

"And so she cannot give up the money? Surely that is a strange thing—that one is not allowed to defraud one's-self?"

"You can defraud yourself as much as you like. If she chooses, she can pay over the £2000 a year, or whatever it is, to Balfour's creditors; but if she surrendered the original sum, she would be defrauding her children: do you see that? Or does your frantic anxiety to

let a woman fling away a fortune that is legally hers blind you to everything ? ”

“ I don’t see that her children, if she has any,” says this tiny but heroic champion of strict morality, “ would benefit much by inheriting money that ought never to have belonged to them. That money, you know very well, belongs to Mr. Balfour’s creditors.”

“ This I know very well—that you would be exceedingly glad to see these two absolute beggars, so that they should be thrown on each other’s helpfulness. I have a suspicion that that is the foundation for this pretty anxiety in the cause of morality and justice. Now there is no use in being angry. Without doubt you have a sensitive conscience; and you are anxious that Lady Sylvia’s conscience should be consulted too; but all the same——”

By this time the proud blood has mounted to her face.

“ I came to you for advice; not for a discourse on the conscience,” she says, with a splendid look of injured dignity. “ I know I

am right; and I know that she is right, children or no children. You say that Lord Willowby will probably refuse——”

“Balfour says so, according to your account.”

“Very well; and you explain that he might be called on to make good the money. Could not he be induced to consent by some guarantee—some indemnity——”

“Certainly; if you can get a big enough fool to become responsible for £50,000 to the end of time. Such people are not common. But there, sit down; and put aside all these fantastic speculations. The immediate thing you want is Lord Willowby’s consent to this act of legal vandalism. If he refuses, his refusal will be based on the personal interests of his daughter. He will not consider children or grandchildren; long before her eldest born can be twenty-one Lord Willowby will be gathered to his fathers; and as for the risk he runs, he has not a brass farthing that any one can seize. Very well: you must explain to Lady Sylvia, in as delicate a way as you can, that there might be youthful Balfours in the days to come;

and that she must consider whether she is acting rightly in throwing away this provision——”

“ But, gracious goodness, her husband wants her to do so, and she wants to do so——”

“ Then let that be settled—of course all husbands’ wishes are law. Then you must explain to her what it is she is asking her father to do ; and point out that it will take a good deal of appealing before he consents. He has a strictly legal right to refuse ; further, he can plead his natural concern for his daughter’s interests——”

“ He ought to have more regard for his daughter’s honour ! ” says she, warmly.

“ Nonsense. You are talking as if Balfour had gone into a conspiracy to get up a fraudulent settlement. It is no business of hers that the firm failed——”

“ I say it is a matter of strict honour and integrity that she should give up this money ; and she *shall* give it up ! ” says Queen T., with an indignant look.

“ Very well, then, if you are all quite con-

tent, there only remains that you should appeal to Lord Willowby."

"Why do you laugh?"

"Lord Willowby thought he would get some money through Balfour marrying his daughter. Now you are asking him to throw away his last chance of ever getting a penny. And you think he will consent."

"His daughter shall make him," said she, confident in the sublime and invincible powers of virtue. Her confidence, in this instance, at least, was not misplaced—so much must be admitted.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW COMPANION.

THE arrival of the new sovereign to take possession of the ceded dominions had been made known to the people at Eagle Creek ranch; and soon our poor Bell was being made the victim of continual interviews, during which agents, overseers, and lawyers vainly endeavoured to get some definite information into her bewildered head. For what was the use of reporting about the last branding of calves, or about the last month's yield of the Belle of St. Joe, or about the probable cost of the new crushing machines, when the perpetual refrain of her thinking was, "O good people, wouldn't you take the half of it; and let me have my children!"

Fortunately her husband was in no wise be-

wildered ; and it was with not a little curiosity that he went off to inspect the horses and two carriages that had been sent on to Denver for us from the ranch. My lord was pleased to express his approval of these ; albeit that one of the vehicles was rather a rude-looking affair. The other, however—doubtless Colonel Sloane's state carriage—was exceedingly smart, and had obviously been polished up for the occasion ; while, as regards the horses, these were able to elicit even something more than approval from this accomplished critic. He went back to the hotel highly pleased. He believed he had got some inkling that life at the ranch was not wholly savage. The beautiful polished shafts and the carefully brushed dark-blue cushions had had an effect on his imagination.

And then, right in the midst of all this turmoil, Lady Sylvia got a telegram from New York. We had just sate down to dinner in the big saloon, at a separate table ; and we were a sufficiently staid and decorous party, for Mr. and Mrs. von Rosen were dressed in black, and the rest of us had donned whatever dark attire we

had with us, out of respect to the memory of the lamented Jack Sloane. (One of the executors was to call in on us after dinner; but no matter.) This telegram produced quite a flutter of excitement; and for the moment we forgot all about Texan herds and placer mines. Lady Sylvia became a trifle pale as the telegram was handed to her, and she seemed to read it at one glance; then, despite herself, a smile of pleasure came to her lips, and the colour returned to her face.

"But what is this, Mr. von Rosen?" she said—and she endeavoured to talk in a matter-of-fact way, as if nothing at all had happened. "My husband speaks of some proposal you have made to him."

"Yes," said the lieutenant, blushing like a guilty schoolboy.

He looked at his wife; and both were a trifle embarrassed; but at this moment Lady Sylvia handed the telegram across the table.

"You may read it," she said indifferently, as if it had conveyed but little news to her.

And yet it was a long telegram—to be sent by a man who was not worth sixpence.

Hugh Balfour, New York, to Lady Sylvia Balfour, Central Hotel, Denver : Have got your letter ; all is right. Shall reach you Saturday. Please tell von Rosen that, subject to your wishes, I accept proposal with gratitude.

“Lady Sylvia,” said the lieutenant, with his bronzed face as full of triumph as if he himself had brought about the whole business, “will you let me cry ‘hurrah!’? Bell, shall I cry ‘hurrah!’? Madame, do you object?”

And he held up the bit of paper for a signal, as if we were about to shock the calm proprieties of Denver.

“May I see the telegram, Lady Sylvia?” said Mrs. von Rosen, taking no notice of her mad husband.

“Certainly. But please tell me, Mr. von Rosen, what the proposal is. Why do you wish to cry ‘hurrah!’?”

“Ah, yes, you may well ask,” said the young man, moderating his fervour, “for I was too soon with my gladness. I will have to per-

suade you before we can cry any hurrahs. What I was thinking of was this—that you and Mr. Balfour would be a whole year with us; and we should have great amusement; and the shooting that I have heard of since yesterday—oh! I cannot tell you of it. But he says it is all subject to your wishes; now I must begin to persuade you to stay away from England for a whole year, and to give us the pleasure of your society. It is a great favour that my wife and myself we both ask of you; for we shall be lonely out here until we get used to the place and know our neighbours; but if you were our neighbours, that would be very pleasant. And I have been very busy to find out about Eagle Creek—oh, no, it is not so bad as you would think; you can have everything from Denver—I do not know about ladies' saddles, but I will ask—and it is the most beautiful and healthy air in the world, Lady Sylvia——”

“My dear Mr. von Rosen,” said Lady Sylvia, interrupting him with a charming smile, “don’t seek to persuade me; I was persuaded when I got the message from my hus-

band; for of course I will do whatever he wishes. But if you will let me say so, I don't think this proposal of yours is very wise. It was scarcely fair of you to write to New York and inveigle my husband into it, without letting me know. It is very charming, no doubt; and you are very kind; and I have not the least doubt we shall enjoy ourselves very much; but you must remember that my husband and myself have something else to think of now. We cannot afford to think only of shooting and riding, and pleasant society. Indeed, I took it for granted that my husband had come out to America to find some profession or occupation; and I am rather surprised that he has accepted your proposal. It was too tempting, I suppose; and I know we shall enjoy ourselves very much——”

Husband and wife had been glancing at each other, as if to inquire which should speak first. It was the lieutenant who took the burden on his shoulders; and certainly he was extremely embarrassed when he began. Fortunately in these western hotels you are expected to order

your dinner all at once; and it is put on the table all at once; and then the waiter retires, unless he happens to be interested in your conversation, when he remains, and looks down on your shoulders. In this case, our coloured brother had moved off a bit.

"Lady Sylvia," said he, "I wish Mr. Balfour had explained to you what the proposal is in a letter; but how could that be? He will be here as soon as any letter. And I am afraid you will think me very impertinent when I tell you."

He looked at her for a second; and then the courage of this man, who had been through the whole of the 1866 and 1870—71 campaigns, and done good service in both, fell away altogether.

"Ah," said he, lightly—but the Germans are not good actors, "it is a little matter. I will leave it to your husband to tell you. Only this I will tell you; that you must not think that your husband will spend the whole year in idleness——"

"It is a mystery, then?" she said, with a

smile. "I am not to be allowed to peep into the secret chamber? Or is it a conspiracy of which I am to be the victim? Mrs. von Rosen, you will not allow them to murder me at the ranch?"

Mrs. von Rosen was a trifle embarrassed also; but she showed greater courage than her husband.

"I will tell you what the secret is, Lady Sylvia," she said, "if my husband won't. He is afraid of offending you; but you won't be offended with me. We were thinking, my husband and myself, that Mr. Balfour was coming out to America to engage in some business; and you know that is not always easy to find; and then we were thinking about our own affairs at the same time. You know, dear Lady Sylvia"—and here she put her hand gently on her friend's hand, as if to stay that awful person's wrath and resentment—"we run a great risk in leaving all these things, both up at Idaho and out on the plains, to be managed by persons who are strangers to us—I mean, when we go back to England. And it occurred

to my husband and myself that if we could get some one whom we could thoroughly trust to stay here and look into the accounts and reports on the spot—well, the truth is, we thought it would be worth while to give such a person an interest in the yearly result rather than any fixed salary. Don't you think so?" she said, rather timidly.

"Oh, yes, certainly," Lady Sylvia replied: she half guessed what was coming.

"And then," said our Bell, cheerfully, as if it was all a joke, "my husband thought he would write to Mr. Balfour telling him that if he liked to try this for a time—just until he could look round and get something better—it would be a great obligation to us; and it would be so pleasant for us to have you out here. That was the proposal, Lady Sylvia. It was only a suggestion. Perhaps you would not care to remain out here, so far away from your home; but in any case I thought you would not be offended."

She was, on the contrary, most deeply and grievously offended, as was natural. Her in-

dignant wrath knew no bounds. Only the sole token of it was two big tears that quietly rolled down her face—despite her endeavours to conceal the fact; and for a second or two she did not speak at all, but kept her head cast down.

“I don’t know,” said she, at length, in a very low, and rather uncertain voice, “what we have done to deserve so much kindness—from all of you.”

“Oh, no, Lady Sylvia,” our Bell said, with the utmost eagerness, “you must not look on it as kindness at all—it is only a business proposal; for, of course, we are very anxious to have everything well looked after in our absence—it is of great importance for the sake of the children. And then, you see, Mr. Balfour and yourself would be able to give it a year’s trial before deciding whether you would care to remain here; and you would be able to find out whether the climate suited you—and whether there was enough amusement——”

“Dear Mrs. von Rosen,” said Lady Sylvia, gently, “you need not try to explain away

your kindness. You would never have thought of this but for our sakes——”

“No,” she cried, boldly, “but why? Because we should have sold off everything at the end of the year, rather than have so much anxiety in England. But if we can get this great business properly managed, why should we throw it away?”

“You forget that my husband knows nothing about it——”

“He will have a year to learn; and his mere presence here will make all the difference.”

“Then is it understood, Lady Sylvia?” the lieutenant said, with all the embarrassment gone away from his face. “You will remain with us for one year anyway?”

“If my husband wishes it, I am very willing,” she said, “and very grateful to you.”

“Ha!” said the lieutenant, “I can see wonderful things now—waggon, camp-fires, supper-parties; and a glass of wine to drink to the health of our friends away in England. Lady Sylvia, your husband and I will write a

book about it—‘A year’s hunting in Colorado and the Rocky Mountains’.”

“I hope my husband will have something else to do,” Lady Sylvia said, “unless you mean to shame us altogether.”

“But no one can be working always. Ah, my good friends,” he said, addressing the remaining two of the party, “you will be sorry when you start to go home to England. You will make a great mistake then. You wish to see the Alleghany mountains in the Indian summer? Oh yes, very good; but you could see that next year; and in the mean time think what splendid fun we shall have——”

“Ask Bell,” said Queen T., with a quiet smile, “whether she would rather return with us now, or wait out here to hear of your shooting black-tailed deer and mountain-sheep?”

At this point a message was brought in to us; and it was unanimously resolved to ask Bell’s business friend to come in and sit down and have a glass of wine with us. Surely there were no secrets about the doings of Five-Ace Jack unfit for us all to hear? We found Mr.

T. W. G—— a most worthy and excellent person, whose temper had not at all been soured by his failure to find the philosopher's stone. It is true, there was a certain sadness over the brown and wrinkled face when he described to us how the many processes for separating the gold from the crushed quartz could just about reach paying expenses, and without doing much more; and how some little improvement in one of these processes, that might be stumbled on by accident, would suddenly make the discoverer a millionaire, the gold-bearing quartz being simply inexhaustible. It was quite clear that Mr. G—— had lost some money in this direction. He was anxious we should go up to Georgetown, when we were at Idaho, to see some mines he had; in fact, he produced sundry little parcels from his pocket, unrolled them, and placed the bits of stone before us with a certain reverent air. Our imagination was not fired.

He had known Colonel Sloane very well; and he spoke most discreetly of him; for was not his niece here in mourning? Nevertheless

there was a slight touch of humour in his tone when he told us of one of Bell's mines—the Virgin Agnes—which led one or two of us to suspect that Five-Ace Jack had not quite abandoned his tricks even when his increasing riches rendered them unnecessary. The Virgin Agnes was a gulch mine, somewhere in the bed of the stream that comes rolling down the Clear Creek canyon; and it was originally owned by a company. It used to pay very well. But by-and-by the yield gradually diminished; until it scarcely paid the wages of the men; and, in fact, the mine was not considered worth working further. At this point it was bought by Colonel Sloane; and the strange thing was that almost immediately it began to yield in a surprising manner, and had continued to do so ever since. Mr. G—— congratulated our Bell on being the owner of this mine; and said he would have much pleasure in showing it to her when she went up to Idaho; but he gravely ended his story without dropping any hint as to the reason why the Virgin Agnes had slowly drooped and

suddenly revived. Nor did he tell us whether the men employed in that mine were generously allowed by Colonel Sloane to share in his good fortune.

He asked Bell whether she proposed to start for Idaho next day. She looked at her husband.

"Oh, no," said the lieutenant, promptly. "We have a friend arriving here on Saturday. We mean to wait for him."

"Pray don't delay on his account," Lady Sylvia said, anxiously. "I can very well remain here for him ; and come up to you afterwards."

"Oh, we shall have plenty to do in these three or four days—plenty," the lieutenant said, "I must see about the ladies' saddles tomorrow ; and I want to buy an extra rifle or two, and a revolver, and a hunting-knife. And then this list of things for the house at Idaho——"

No doubt there was a good deal to be done ; only one would have thought that three or four days was pretty fair time in which to pre-

pare for a short trip up the Clear Creek canyon. It was not, however. On the Saturday morning, every one was most extraordinarily busy, especially as the time approached for the arrival of the train from Cheyenne. Next day all the shops would be shut; and on Monday morning early we started.

"Lady Sylvia," said the lieutenant, with ingenuous earnestness, "I must really go after those saddles again. Tell Mr. Balfour I shall be back to lunch, will you, if you please?"

Indeed one went away on one mission; and the other on another; until there was no one of the party left in the hotel with Lady Sylvia but Queen T. The latter was in her own room. She rang, and sent a servant to ask her friend to come and see her. She took Lady Sylvia's hand when she entered.

"I am going to ask you to excuse me," said she, with great innocence. "I feel a little tired; I think I will lie down for an hour, until luncheon-time. But you know, dear Lady Sylvia, if there are none of them down-stairs, all you have to do is to get into the omnibus

when it calls at the door ; and they will drive you to the station ; and you will not have long to wait."

The white hand she held was trembling violently. Lady Sylvia said nothing at all ; but her eyes were moist ; and she silently kissed her friend, and went away.

About an hour thereafter, four of us were seated at a certain small table, all as mute as mice. The women pretended to be very busy with the things before them. No one looked towards the door.

Nay, no one would look up as two figures came into the big saloon, and came walking down towards us.

"Mrs. von Rosen," said the voice of Lady Sylvia, in the gayest of tones, "let me present to you your new agent——"

But her gaiety suddenly broke down. She left him to shake hands with us ; and sate down on a chair in the dusky corner ; and hid away her face from us, sobbing to herself.

"Ha !" cried the lieutenant, in his stormiest way, for he would have none of this sentiment,

“do you know what we have got for you after your long journey? My good friend, there is a beefsteak coming for you; and that—do you know what that is?—that is a bottle of English ale!”

CHAPTER XVI.

OUR LAST NIGHT TOGETHER.

ON that Monday morning, when we left Denver to seek Bell's distant home in these pale blue mountains, there was no great rejoicing among us. It was the last day of our long journeying together; and we had been pleasantly associated: moreover one of us was going to leave her dearest friend in these remote wilds, and she was rather downhearted about it. Happily the secret exultation of Lady Sylvia, which could not altogether be concealed, kept up our spirits somewhat: we wondered whether she was not going to carry her husband's portmanteau for him, so anxious was she about his comfort.

The branch line of rail that pierces for some distance the Clear Creek canyon takes a circuitous course on leaving Denver through some

grassy plains which are intersected by narrow and muddy rivulets, and are sufficiently uninteresting; so that there was plenty of opportunity for these sojourners to sketch out something of their plans of living for the information of the new comer. But Balfour—who, by the way, had got thoroughly bronzed by his travelling—would not hear of all the fine pleasure-excursions that the lieutenant was for planning out.

“We are under enough obligation to you,” said he, “even if I find I can do this thing; but if I discover that I am of no use at all then your charity would be too great. Let us get to work first; then, if the way is clear, we can have our play afterwards. Indeed you will be able to command my attendance, once I have qualified myself to be your servant.”

“Yes, that is reasonable,” said the lieutenant.

“I am quite sure,” said Lady Sylvia, “that my husband would be a poor companion for you, so long as our affairs are unsettled——”

“And besides,” said Balfour, with a laugh, “you don’t know what splendid alternative

schemes I have to fall back on. On the voyage over I used to lie awake at night and try to imagine all the ways in which a man may earn a living who is suddenly made penniless. And I got up some good schemes, I think : good for a man who could get some backing, I mean."

"Will you please to tell us some of them?" said Queen T., with no apparent sarcasm. "We are so often appealed to for charity; and it would be delightful to be able to tell poor people how to make a fortune."

"The poor people would have to have some influence. But would you like to hear my schemes? They are numberless; and they are all based on the supposition that in London there are a very large number of people who would pay high prices for the simplest necessities of life, provided you could supply these of the soundest quality. Do you see? I take the case of milk, for example. Think of the number of mothers in London who would pay a double price for milk for their children, if you could guarantee them that it was quite unwatered and got from cows living whole-

somely in the country instead of in London stalls? That is only one of a dozen things. Take bread, for example. I believe there are thousands of people in London who would pay extra for French bread if they only knew how to get it supplied to them. Very well: I step in with my association—for the wants of a great place like London can only be supplied by big machinery—and I get a duke or two and a handful of M.P.'s with me to give it a philanthropic look; and of course they make me manager. I do a good public work; and I benefit myself."

"Do you think you would succeed as the manager of a dairy?" said Queen T., gently.

"As well, probably," said he, laughing, "as the manager of Mrs. von Rosen's mines and farms! But having got up the company, you would not ask me to look after the cows."

"Oh, Hugh," said Lady Sylvia, anxiously, "I hope you will never have anything to do with any company. It is that which has got poor papa into such trouble. I wish he could leave all these things for a time; and come out

here for a holiday: it would do him a great deal of good."

This filial wish did not seem to awaken any eager response, though Mrs. von Rosen murmured something about the pleasure it would give her to see Lord Willowby. We had not much hope of his lordship consenting to live at a ranch.

And now we drew near the Rockies. First of all, rising from the plains, we encountered some ridges of brown, seared, earthy-looking hills, for the most part bare, though here and there the crest was crowned by a ridge of pine. At the mouth of one of the valleys we came upon Golden City, a scattered hamlet of small houses, with some trees and some thin lines of a running stream about it. Then, getting further into the mountains, we entered the narrow and deep gorge of the Clear Creek canyon, a naturally formed highway that runs and winds sinuously for about thirty miles between the huge walls of rock on either side. It was not a beautiful valley this deep cleft among the mountains; but a gloomy and desolate place,

with lightning-blasted pines among the greys and reds of the fused fire-rocks; an opaque grey-green river rushing down the chasm; the trees overhead, apparently at the summit of the twin precipices, black against the glimmer of the blue sky. Here and there, however, were vivid gleams of colour: a blaze of the yellow leaves of the cottonwood, or a mass of crimson creeper growing over a grey rock. We began to wonder, too, whether this small river could really have cut this deep and narrow chasm in the giant mountains; but there, sure enough, far above us on the steep slopes, were the deep holes in the intertwisted quartz out of which the water in bygone ages must have slowly worked the boulders of some alien material. There were other holes, too, visible on the sides of this gloomy gorge, with some brown earth in front of them, as if some animal had been trying to scrape for itself a den there: these were the "prospect holes" that miners had bored to spy into the secrets of the everlasting hills. Down below us, again, was the muddy stream, rushing between its beds of gravel;

and certainly this railway-carriage, on its narrow guage, seemed to tilt dangerously over towards the sheer descent and the plunging waters. The train, indeed, as it wound round the rocks, seemed to be some huge Python, hunted into its gloomy lair in the mountains.

We were glad to get out of it, and into the clear sunshine, at the terminus, Floyd Hill; and here we found a couple of stage-coaches, each with four horses, awaiting to carry us still further up into the Rockies. They were strange-looking vehicles, apparently mostly built of leather, and balanced on leather springs of enormous thickness. But they soon disappeared from sight. We were lost in such clouds of dust as were never yet beheld by mortal man. Those who had gone inside to escape found that the half-dozen windows would not keep shut; and that, as they were flung hither and thither by the plunging of the coach up the steep mountain-paths, they lost sight of each other in the dense yellow clouds. And then sometimes a gust of wind would cleave an opening in the clouds; and behold! a flashing picture

of pine-clad mountains, with a dark blue sky above. That jolting journey seemed to last for ever and ever; and the end of it found us changed into new creatures. But the coat of dust that covered us from head to heel had not sufficed to blind us; and now before our eyes we found the end and aim of our journey—the far hamlet of Idaho.

Bell looked round bewildered; she had dreaded this approach to her future home. And Queen T., anxious above all things that her friend's first impressions should be favourable, cried out—

“Oh, Bell, how beautiful, and clean, and bright it is!”

And certainly our first glance at Idaho, after the heat and dust we had come through, was cheering enough. We thought for an instant of Chamounix as we saw the small white houses by the side of the green, rushing stream; and the great mountains rising sheer beyond. There was a cool and pleasant wind rustling through the leaves of the young cottonwood trees planted in front of the inn. And when we

turned to the mountains on the other side of the narrow valley, we found even the lofty pine-woods glowing with colour; for the mid-day sun was pouring down on the undergrowth—now of a golden yellow, so that one could almost believe that these far slopes were covered with buttercups. The coaches had stopped at the inn—the Beebee House, as it is called—and Colonel Sloane's heiress was received with much distinction. They showed her Colonel Sloane's house. It stood on a knoll some distance off; but we could see that it was a cheerful-looking place, with a green-painted verandah round the white walls, and a few pines and cottonwoods about. In the mean time we had taken rooms at the inn; and speedily set to work to get some of the dust removed. It was a useful occupation; for no doubt the worry of it tended to allay that nervous excitement among our women-folk from which Bell, more especially, was obviously suffering. When we all assembled thereafter at our mid-day meal, she was still somewhat pale. The lieutenant declared that, after so much travelling, she must now take a long rest.

He would not allow her to go on to Georgetown for a week at least.

And was there ever in all the world a place more conducive to rest than this distant, silent, sleepy Idaho up here in the lonely mountains? When the coaches had whirled away in the dust towards Georgetown, there was nothing to break the absolute calm but the soft rustling of the small trees; there was not a shred of cloud in the blue sky to bar the glare of the white road with a bit of grateful shadow. After having had a look at Bell's house, we crossed to the other side of the valley, and entered a sort of tributary gorge between the hills which is known as the Soda Creek canyon. Here all vestiges of civilization seemed to end, but for the road that led we knew not whither; and in the strange silence we wandered onward into this new world, whose plants, and insects, and animals were all unfamiliar to us, or familiar only as they suggested some similarity to their English relatives. And yet Queen T. strove to assure Bell that there was nothing wonderful about the place except its extreme silence

and a certain sad desolation of beauty. Was not this our identical Michaelmas-daisy, she asked? She was overjoyed when she discovered a real and veritable hare-bell—a trifle darker in colour than our hare-bell, but a hare-bell all the same. She made a dart at a cluster of yellow flowers growing up among the rocks, thinking they were the mountain-saxifrage; but they turned out to be a composite plant—probably some sort of hawkweed. Her efforts to reach these flowers had startled a large bird out of the bushes above; and as it darted off, we could see that it was of a dark and luminous blue: she had to confess that he was a stranger. But surely we could not have the heart to regard the merry little chipmunk as a stranger—which of all living creatures is the friendliest, the blithest, the most comical. In this Soda Creek canyon he reigns supreme; every rock and stone and bush seems instinct with life as this Proteus of the animal world scuds away like a mouse, or shoots up the hill-side like a lizard, only, when he has got a short distance, to perch himself up on his hind-legs, and curl

up his bushy tail, and eye us demurely as he affects to play with a bit of mayweed. Then we see what the small squirrel-like animal really is—a beautiful little creature with longitudinal bars of golden brown and black along his back; the same bars on his head, by the side of his bright, watchful eyes; the red of a robin's breast on his shoulders; his furry tail, jauntily cocked up behind, of a pale brown. We were never tired of watching the tricks and attitudes of this friendly little chap. We knew quite well that his sudden dart from the lee of some stone was only the pretence of fright; before he had gone a yard he would sit up on his haunches, and look at you, and stroke his nose with one of his fore-paws. Sometimes he would not even run away a yard; but sit quietly and watchfully to see us pass. We guessed that there were few stone-throwing boys about the Rocky Mountains.

Behold! the valley at last shows one brief symptom of human life: a waggon drawn by a team of oxen comes down the steep road, and the driver thereof is worth looking at, albeit

his straw sombrero shades his handsome and sun-tanned face. He is an ornamental person, this bull-whacker; with the cord tassels of his buckskin jacket just appearing from below the great Spanish cloak of blue cloth that is carelessly thrown round his shoulders. Look at his whip, too—the heavy thongs of it inter-twisted like serpents: he has no need of bowie-knife or pistol in these wilds while he carries about with him that formidable weapon. The oxen pass on down the valley; the dust subsides; again we are left with the silence, and the warm sunlight, and the aromatic odours of the mayweed, and the cunning antics of our ubiquitous friend the chipmunk.

“There,” said the lieutenant, looking up to the vast hill-slopes above, where the scattered pines stood black among the blaze of yellow undergrowth, “that is the beginning of our hunting-country. All the secrets are behind that fringe of wood. You must not imagine, Lady Sylvia, that our life at Idaho is to be only this dulness of walking—”

“I can assure you I do not feel it dull at

all," she said, "but I am sorry that our party is to be broken up—just when it has been completed. Oh, I wish you could stay with us!" she adds, addressing another member of the party, whose hands are full of wild-flowers.

"My dear Lady Sylvia," says this person, with her sweetest smile, "what would you all do if you had not us to take back your messages to England? We are to teach Bell's little girl to say Idaho. And when Christmas comes, we shall think of you at a particular hour—oh, by the way, we have never yet fixed the exact difference of time between Surrey and Idaho——"

"We will do that before you leave, Madame," says the lieutenant, "but I am sure we will think of you a good many times before Christmas comes. And when Mr. Balfour and I we have our bears, and buffaloes, and elephants, and all these things, we will see whether we cannot get something sent you in ice for your Christmas party. And you will drink our good health, Madame, will you not? And perhaps,

if you are very kind, you might send us one bottle of very good Rhine wine, and we will drink your health, too. Nee! I meant two bottles, for the four of us——”

“I think we shall be able to manage that,” says she; and visions of real Schloss Johannisberg, each bottle swathed in printed and signed guarantees of genuineness, no doubt began to dance before her nimble brain.

But at this moment a cold breeze came rushing down the narrow gorge; and almost at the same instant we saw the edge of a heavy cloud come lowering over the very highest peak of the mountains. Some little familiarity with the pranks of the weather in the Western Highlands suggested that, having no water-proofs, and no shelter being near, we had better make down the valley again in the direction of Idaho; and this we set about doing. The hot afternoon had grown suddenly chill. A cold wind whistled through the trembling leaves of the cottonwoods. The mountains were overshadowed; and by the time we reached Idaho again, it seemed as if the night had already

come down. The women, in their thin dresses, were glad to get in-doors.

“But it is this very thing,” the lieutenant cried—for he was anxious that his wife should regard her new home favourably—“that makes these places in the Rocky Mountains so wholesome; so healthful, I mean. I have heard of it from many people, who say here is the best sleeping-place in the world. It is no matter how warm it is in the day; it is always cold at night; you always must have a blanket here. The heat—that is nothing, if you have the refreshing cold of the night; people who cannot sleep anywhere else, they can sleep here very well. Every one says that.”

“Yes; and I will tell you this,” he added, turning to Balfour, “you ought to have stayed some days more in Denver, as all people do, to get accustomed to the thin air, before coming up here. All the doctors say that.”

“Thank you,” said Balfour, laughing, “my lungs are pretty tough. I don’t suffer any inconvenience.”

“That is very well, then; for they say the

air of these places will kill a consumptive person——”

“Oh, Oswald!” his wife cried. “Don’t frighten us all.”

“Frighten you?” said he. “Will you show me the one who is likely to be consumptive? There is not any one of us does look like it. But if we all turn to be consumptive, cannot we go down to the plains? and we will give up the mountain-sheep for the antelope——”

“I do believe,” said his wife, with some vexation, “that you had not a thought in coming out here except about shooting!”

“And I do believe,” he said, “that you had no thought except about your children. Oh, you ungrateful woman. You wear mourning—yes; but when do you really mourn for your poor uncle? When do you speak of him? You have not been to his grave yet.”

“You know very well it was yourself who insisted on our coming here first,” said she, with a blushing face; but it was not a deadly quarrel.

The chillness of the night did not prevent our going out for a walk later on, when all the world seemed asleep. And now the clouds had passed away from the heavens ; and the clear stars were shining down over the mystic darkness of the mountains. In the silence around us we only heard the plashing of the stream. It was to be our last night together.

CHAPTER XVII.

AUF WIEDERSEHEN !

IN the early morning—the morning of farewell—we stood at the small window—we two who were leaving—and tried to fix in our memories some picture of the surroundings of Bell's home; for we knew that many a time in the after-days we should think of her and endeavour to form some notion of what she was engaged in at the moment, and of the scene around her. And can we remember it now? The sunlight seems to fall vertically from that blazing sky; and there is a pale mist of heat far up in the mountains, so that the dark pine-woods appear to have a faint blue fog hanging around them. On the barer slopes, where the rocks project in shoulders, there is a more brilliant light; for there the undergrowth of cottonwood bushes,

in its autumn gold, burns clear and sharp, even at this distance. And then the eye comes down to the still valley; and the scattered white houses; and the small and rustling trees. We seem to hear the running of the stream.

And what was that little bit of paper thrust furtively, almost at the last moment, into our Bell's trembling hand? We did not know that we had been entertaining a poetess unawares among us; or had she copied the verses out of a book, just as one takes a flower from a garden and gives it as a token of remembrance—something tangible to recall distant faces and bygone friends?

"O Idaho! Far Idaho!"

A last farewell before we go——"

—that was all that the companion of this unhonoured Sappho managed to make out as the paper was snatched from her hand. No doubt it invoked blessings on the friends to whom we were bidding good-bye. No doubt it spoke of the mother's thinking of her children far away. And there certainly was no doubt that the verses, whether they were good verses or bad

verses, served their turn ; and are treasured up at this moment as though their like had never been seen.

On that warm, clear, beautiful morning, when the heavy coach came rolling up to the door of the inn, Balfour and Lady Sylvia did not at all seem broken down by emotion ; on the contrary they both appeared to be in high spirits. But our poor Bell was a wretched spectacle, about which nothing more shall be said here. Her last words were about her children ; but they were almost inaudible through the violence of her sobbing. And we knew well, as we caught the last glimpse of that waved handkerchief, that this token of farewell was not meant for us : it was but a message we were to carry back with us across the seas, to a certain home in Surrey.

Hier hat die Mär' ein Ende ; and yet the present writer, if he is not over-taxing the patience of the reader, would like to say a word about the fashion in which two people, living pretty much by themselves down in the solitudes of Surrey, used to try to establish some

link of interest and association with their friends far away in Colorado ; and how, at these times, pictures of bygone scenes would rise before their minds, soft, and clear, and beautiful, for the troubles and trials of travelling were now all forgotten, and the pleasant passages of our journeying could be separated and strung like lambent beads on the thread of memory.

Or shall we not rather take, as a last breach of confidence, this night of all the nights in the year—this Christmas eve—which we more particularly devote to our dear and absent friends ? It is now drawing away from us. We have been over to Bell's almost deserted house ; and there, as the children were being put to bed, we heard something about Ilaho. It was as near as the little girl could get to it ; it will suffice for a message.

And now, late as it is, and our own house being wrapped in silence after all the festivities of the evening— well, to tell the truth, there *was* a wild turkey, and there *were* some canvass-back duck ; and we were not bound to tell two eagerly inquisitive boys that these could not

well come from Colorado, though they did come from America—a madness seems to come over our gentle Queen Titania, and she will go out into the darkness, though the night is cold, and there is snow on the ground. We go forth into the silent world. The thin snow is crisp and dry under-foot. The stars are shining over our heads. There is no wind to stir the black shadows of the trees.

And now, as the time draws near when we are to send that unspoken message to the listening ones across the seas, surely they are waiting like ourselves? And the dark night, even up here on Mickleham Downs, where we go by the dusky yew-trees like ghosts, becomes afire with light, and colour, and moving shapes; for we are thinking once more of the many scenes that connect us by an invisible chain with our friends of the past. How long ago was it that we sate in the long saloon; and the fog-horn was booming outside; and we heard Lady Sylvia's tender voice singing with the others, "Abide with me; fast falls the eventide," as the good ship plunged onwards and through

the waste of waters? But the ship goes too slow for us. We can outstrip its speed. We are already half-way over to Bell's retreat; and here we shall rest; for are we not high over the Hudson, in the neighbourhood of the haunted mountains?—and we have but to give another call to reach the far plains of Colorado!

* * * * *

Ho, Vanderdecken—Heinrich Hudson—can you take our message from us and pass it on? This is a night, of all the nights in the long year, that you are sure to be abroad, you and your sad-faced crew, up there in the lonely valleys, under the light of the stars. Can you go still higher and send a view-halloo across to the Rocky Mountains? Can you say to our friends that we are listening? Can you tell them that something has just been said—they will know by whom—about a certain dear mother at Idaho? Give a call, then, across the waste Atlantic, that we may hear! Or is it the clamour of the katydids that drowns the ghostly voice? We cannot hear at all. Perhaps the old men are cowering in their cave, because of the sacred time; and there is

no mirth in the hills to-night; and no huge cask of schnapps to be tapped, that the heavy beards may wag. Vanderdecken—Hendrick Hudson—you are of no use to us: we pass on: we leave the dark mountains behind us, under the silent stars.

* * * * *

*Saint of this green isle, hear our prayer,
Grant us cool heavens and favouring air!
Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast;
The rapids are near and the daylight's past!*

Look at the clear gold ray of the lighthouses; and the pale green of the sunset skies; and the dark islands and trees catching the last red flush. And is not this Bell's voice singing to us, with such a sweetness as the Lake of a Thousand Islands never heard before——

*Soon as the woods on shore look dim,
We'll sing at St. Ann's our parting hymn.*

The red flame in the west burns into our eyes; we can see no more.

* * * * *

We are startled by this wild roaring in our ears, as if the world were falling; and we are in a mystical cavern; and the whirling grey cataracts threaten

to tear us from the narrow foothold. Our eyes are blinded; our throats are choked; our fingers still clutch at the dripping rocks; and then all at once we see your shining and smiling face—you giant black demon—you magnificent Sambo—you huge child of the nether world of waters! We KENT GO NO FORDER DEN DAWT? Is that what you say? We shout to you through this infernal din that we can—we can—we can! We elude your dusky fingers. We send you a mocking farewell. Let the waters come crashing down; for we have dived—and drifted—and come up into the white sunlight again!

* * * * *

And now there is no sound at all. We cannot even hear Bell's voice; for she is standing silent in front of the Chief's grave; and she is wondering whether his ghost is still lingering here, looking for the ships of the white man going up and down the great river. For our part, we can see none at all. The broad valley is deserted; the Missouri shows no sign of life; on the wide plains around us we find only the reed-bird and the grasshopper. Farewell, White Cow; if your last wish is not gratified, at least the silence of the prairie is reserved to you; and no

alien plough crosses the solitude of your grave. You are an amiable ghost, we think ; we would shake hands with you, and give you a friendly ' How ? ' ; but the sunlight is in our eyes, and we cannot see you, just as you cannot make out the ships on that long line of river. May you have everlasting tobacco in the world of dreams !

* * * * *

You infamous Hendrick Hudson, will not you carry our message now—for our voices cannot reach across the desert plains ? Awaken, you cowed heads, and come forth into the starlight ; for the Christmas bells have not rung yet ; and there is time for a solemn passing of the glass ! High up in your awful solitudes, you can surely hear us ; and we will tell you what you must call across the plains, for they are all silent now, as silent as the white skulls lying in the sand. Vanderdecken, for the sake of Heaven—if that has power to conjure you—call to our listening friends ; and we will pledge you in a glass to-night, and you and your ghastly crew will nod your heads in ominous laughter——

* * * * *

But what is this that we hear, suddenly

shaking the pulses of the night with its tender sound? O friends far away!—do you know that our English bells are beginning to ring in the Christmas-time? If you cannot hear our faint voice across the wild Atlantic and the silent plains, surely you can hear the sounds you knew so well in the bygone days! Over the crisp snow, and by the side of the black trees and hedges, we hurry homewards. We sit in a solitary room; and still we hear outside the faint tolling of the bells. The hour nears; and it is no dire spirit that we expect; but the gentle soul of a mother coming with a message to her sleeping children, and stopping for a moment in passing to look on her friends of old.

And she will take our message back, we know; and tell that other young wife out there that we are glad to hear that her heart is at peace at last. But what will the invisible messenger take back for herself? A look at her children: who knows?

A second to twelve. Shall we give a wild scream, then, as the ghost enters; for the

silence is awful? Ah, no. Whether you are here or not, our good Bell, our hearts go forth towards you; and we welcome you; and we are glad that, even in this silent fashion, we can bring in the Christmas-time together. But is the gentle spirit here; or has it passed? A stone's-throw from our house is another house; and in it there is a room dimly lit; and in the room are two sleeping children. If the beautiful mother has been here with us amid the faint tolling of these Christmas bells, you may be sure she only smiled upon us in passing, and that she is now in that silent room.

THE END.